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to  
Dr. H. A. van Coenen Torchiana  
from his friend

H. J. Barnouw

Village Fair View.  
Santa Cruz, Cal.  
U.S.A. October 1933.



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**GREAT HOLLANDERS**

*Edited by* **EDWARD W. BOK**

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**VONDEL**

PREVIOUS VOLUMES IN THIS SERIES

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I ERASMUS . . . . . By J. Huizinga

II WILLIAM THE SILENT . By Frederic Harrison



**GREAT HOLLANDERS**  
*Edited by* **EDWARD W. BOK**

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# VONDEL

*drizaan*  
BY  
**A. J. BARNOUW**

**QUEEN WILHELMINA PROFESSOR AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

**WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
THE EDITOR**

**CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS**  
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**1925**

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF MY DEAR MASTER  
DR. G. KALFF



## AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS BOOK

Every American tourist to Amsterdam visits Vondel Park. Few, however, know of the significance of the name attached to the beautiful area of tree and shrub and flower. This book will tell them.

The average American will read here, probably for the first time, the story of a life which will fill him with amazement. No American poet has ever lived such a life as was that of Vondel. It is inconceivable in this country and in these days. Here is a man who lived a span of ninety-one full years, covering the eventful last decade of the 16th and more than three-quarters of the 17th centuries. He passed through all those pangs of anxieties in a public recognition of his work which are the lot of the poet. It is strange reading in these days, the story of a poet of the standing of Vondel writing birthday odes, wedding verses, commercial advertisements in verse and municipal glorifications,—all for money. But Vondel lived in a day when publishers paid no royalties. It was the same period when dramatists wrote for the stage without a penny's compensation,—that strange day when a woman was not permitted to act on the stage and women's parts were portrayed by men.

So Vondel passed through those days first as a versifier, then as a poet, later as a dramatist, and as such the author of "Lucifer,"—one of the greatest tragedies

in verse in the literature of the world. But even this monumental work which has come down to us through the ages was permitted to be played only twice on the stage when it was declared taboo by the government authorities. Yet was Vondel unequalled in Dutch literature. He stood in the realm of letters where Rembrandt stood in the realm of art.

Not less remarkable was this singularly gifted man's slow but steady progress on his way to Rome: his slow conversion from a rigid early training in the Baptist faith to the Roman Catholic form of belief in his later years; and then, at last, to be buried in a Protestant church!

It is a new story to America,—this story of a man who was conservatively regarded as the greatest poet of his age and yet whose life and works are scarcely known on this side of the Atlantic. But this is the purpose of these stories of "Great Hollanders": that the intelligent American reader may know better than he does at present the remarkable figures which glorified the pages of Dutch history, and spread the influence of their works all over Europe when the United States was little more than a discovered land.

What is particularly valuable about this volume is the full and graphic background against which Doctor Barnouw has sketched the life of the great Vondel. Catching the spirit of the great word-painter whom he portrays, he has given us a wonderful picture of the times in which Vondel lived,—an important factor in biography which is so often lacking, and without which no life can be accurately judged. In this book we feel



## AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS BOOK ix

not only the personality of a great poet in his ascent to the highest pinnacle of fame and his descent to a cruel state of debt-ridden poverty, but we see the strange times in which he lived,—times of discord which happily we have outlived and yet which by their very nature inspired this man of genius to heights of sublime poetry.

It is all very confusing from the viewpoint of psychology, but thrilling from the viewpoint of knowledge.

EDWARD W. BOK.

Merion  
Pennsylvania  
January 1925



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***GREAT HOLLANDERS***

*Edited by* **EDWARD W. BOK**

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**VONDEL**



## A TALE OF THREE CITIES

### I.

Joost van den Vondel, of Antwerp by descent, of Cologne by birth, of Amsterdam by adoption, affords in this threefold association an epitome of Netherlandish history during the eighty years' war against Spain. The terrorism of the Duke of Alva drove the dissenters from the Church of Rome into exile. They remembered the words that the Lord had said unto Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee," and took them for their own guidance. They went and lived among strangers, in London, and the seaports of South England, in Embden, in Wesel, in Cologne, abiding the time when freedom and safety would again be secure in the Low Countries. That time soon came. Holland, in the north, withstood triumphantly the Spanish armies and offered the fugitives shelter and citizenship in her towns. Antwerp and the entire south had, by that time, been reduced to subjection under the Spanish yoke. By its surrender to the Duke of Parma in 1585 the city surrendered all hope of regaining her Protestant fugitives. Thus Antwerp ceded to Cologne the glory of giving birth to the greatest of Dutch poets, and the devotion of his song, when he grew to manhood, was given to her rival, Amsterdam. In severing its fate from that of the North, the South sacrificed more than the unity of the Nether-

lands; it sacrificed its own share in the heritage of Dutch culture.

The poet's maternal grandfather, Peter Kraan, was a member of a Baptist congregation at a time when to belong to that most defenceless of sects was deemed the gravest offence, for which only death could atone. It has been argued, on very plausible grounds, that his wife, Clementia, was not of that persuasion, but remained within the fold of the Mother Church. It was she, however, who suffered for the heresy of which her husband stood guilty. Peter, to escape the doom of the Spanish inquisition, fled with the children to Cologne, leaving his wife at home to await her confinement. She was locked up in the *Steen*, the Antwerp prison, the authorities probably intending to hold her until the husband should return and pay for her freedom with his life. She had, fortunately, among her Antwerp relatives a man of some influence and wealth, who succeeded in obtaining her release on bail until she had recovered from childbirth. After the delivery of her child, she was returned to her jailors and, according to Vondel's earliest biographer, who got his information from the poet himself, the inquisition condemned her to die at the stake. Again her cousin came to the rescue. He begged and obtained a stay of execution, and learning that she might be saved if one of her children were baptized by a Catholic priest, he sent for a daughter who had fled with the father to Cologne. The child was christened according to the Roman rite, and the mother, after much pleading and pressing, was released on condition that she should continue to live a true Catholic, whereupon she left the city of her trials to join Peter Kraan in exile.



That was in 1571. The Vondels were then still in Antwerp and continued to confess, perhaps by lip service only, the Catholic faith. In June, 1569, a "Joost the hatter" was burnt at the stake as a Baptist. Both the name and the calling ran in the family of the Vondels, and it may well be that the fate of this man had taught his relatives some caution. The poet's grandfather, at any rate, had his children baptized according to the Roman rite, and lived apparently an unsuspected Catholic in the city of Antwerp until his death. But his son Joost seems to have joined the Baptists and fled in 1582 to Cologne. It was there that he married Sara, Peter Kraan's daughter, three years later.

The young couple lived in a house of the *Witschgasse*, which from its signboard was called the Violet. In the Violet the poet was born on November 19, 1587. An eagle spread his wings over the door of Milton's birthplace, fit emblem of the poetic flight to which the nursing was destined to soar. The sign in the *Witschgasse* held no such promise, but Vondel, when he also had taken wing, made the most of that humble device, remembering the days when, as a happy bee, he had sucked his first honey in a violet. He was seven years old when he flew away for good. Life for the Baptists was not much freer in Cologne than in Antwerp. In 1595, Vondel the hatter was fined a heavy penalty for being of the Baptists, but he succeeded, by pleading poverty, in beating the sum down to twelve gold florins. That experience seems to have served him as a warning to depart. With their three children, Clementia, Joost, and Sara, their latest born, still in swaddling clothes, Joost and his wife traveled southward to Frankfurt, then north again to

Bremen, and thence via Utrecht to Amsterdam and safety within the frontiers of the young Dutch Republic. Various reasons have been suggested for the choice of this roundabout way. The most likely one is that the Vondels had relatives or friends among the Flemish refugees living in Frankfurt and Bremen, and that the purpose of their visit to them was either to look out for a fit place to settle in or to say farewell before the intended journey into Holland. They did settle, temporarily, in Utrecht, where the poet's mother had a step-sister living. But they did not stay there long. Amsterdam held attractions that Utrecht could not offer. Before the end of the year 1596 the fugitives found a resting place within the walls of Amsterdam, and on March 27, 1597, Vondel the hatter was sworn in as a burgess and paid the required eight guilders (\$3.20) for his citizenship. This assured him advantages which justified the expenditure. Only citizens had the right to ply their craft or trade in Amsterdam, they were exempt from the payment of customs within the province of Holland, and, if they met with injustice abroad, the city interceded in their behalf. Vondel senior could not have started and prospered in business without the benefits derived from his new citizenship.

He did not resume the hatter's trade. That handicraft was not yet organized as a guild when the Vondels arrived in Amsterdam, and the lack of fixed rules and regulations made it a risky undertaking for a newly arrived, honest alien to set up business in that line. "There is great disorder and disturbance among the common felt-hat makers in this city," says a contemporary report, "both on account of quarrels and misunderstand-

ings between masters and servants about the work, the duration of the apprenticeship, etc., and because of the alien hatters, who, with worthless felts, are bringing the felt trade into disrepute and lower the reputation which the city had for its manufacture of good and lasting felts." The old Vondel was not the kind of alien that thrives by deceit, and learning that the scrupulous workman had little chance of prospering in the felt business, he launched into the silk trade, in which some relatives of his, also fugitives from Antwerp, were already engaged when he joined them in Amsterdam.

He took a house in the *Warmoesstraat*, the main thoroughfare of the oldest part of the city. In the sixteenth century it was the quarter where the ruling class chose to live, but in Vondel's time it was a busy street of tradesmen's shops and merchants' offices and warehouses. Amsterdam was at that time a city of more than one hundred thousand inhabitants. The leaven of a new spirit was at work in this busy community. From a mediaeval town with a fairly homogeneous population, it had grown, during the latter part of the sixteenth century, to a modern city where the increase of rapidly accumulated wealth began to draw sharper distinctions between citizens than had existed in the past, the capitalists forming a class by themselves, finding in their money the means to political power. The old order of the early sixteenth century was on the wane, and such ruling families of former days as fondly clung to the past were superseded by the upstarts of dame Fortune. The city, in 1578, "had kicked the faith of Rome from all its churches," as Vondel would afterwards express it, and many of those who still adhered to the banished

creed saw their own social greatness decline with the decline of the Mother Church. It was not that loss of position was the price they paid for their piety; the same conservatism which made them cling to a lost cause rendered them more or less unfit for the life of a younger generation which was all in a ferment to create a new order out of the obsolete past. The Roman Catholic who, in spite of his Catholicism, was caught by the new spirit, was not barred from sharing in commercial enterprise and its fruits. Hendrick Laurensz Spieghel, successful merchant and man-of-letters, was a modernist in everything but his devotion to the Mother Church. Cornelis Gijsbertsz Plomp, the son of Catholic parents, and a faithful son of the Church until his dying day, had nevertheless a successful law practice and enjoyed general esteem in Amsterdam as a local historian and a poet of Latin verse. Men of that type, however, were the exceptions. Retention of the old faith and decline of social status were not cause and effect, but concomitant results of a state of mind out of harmony with life's new music.

The heart of the nine-year-old immigrant from Cologne must have beat in unison with that music. To the impressionable imagination of a poet in the bud the Amsterdam of 1600 was a scene as strange and fascinating as was his treasure trove to Aladdin. Close by his father's house in the *Warmoesstraat* the river *Amstel*, from which the city takes its name, flowed into the larger water expanse of the *Y*, and from the New Bridge, which crossed the *Amstel* just above the point of confluence, the boy must often have eagerly watched the

ships run into port with their mysterious cargoes from more mysterious distant countries. The Vondels arrived at a time when the Amsterdam merchant began to expand his trade beyond the limits reached by his ambitions in the past. The countries bordering the Baltic Sea, the coasts of France and Portugal, and the harbors of England and Scotland were, until the early nineties of the sixteenth century, the chief spheres of activity for Dutch commercial enterprise. But in that last decade a mighty impulse filled their sails to seek profit and adventure in ever farther regions, in the Far East through the arctic north or past the Cape of Good Hope and in the West Indies, in the track of Englishman, Spaniard, and Portuguese. "We had a great trade in *Russia* seventy years," complained Sir Walter Raleigh about 1610, "and about fourteen years past we sent store of goodly ships to trade in those parts, and three years past we set out but four, and this last year two or three; but to the contrary the *Hollanders* about 20 years since traded thither with two ships only, yet now they are increased to about thirty or forty, and one of their ships is as great as two of ours." The Dutch trader, about this time, invaded the Mediterranean and the countries under the rule of the Sublime Porte, the Dutch diplomat soon following the flag in the person of Cornelis Haga, Holland's first representative, called "orator" in those days, at Constantinople. The first ships to be chartered by a group of Amsterdam merchants for a voyage to Java left Texel in April, 1595, and Vondel must have heard the church bells of the city toll a welcome to Cornelis de Houtman and his intrepid crew on their safe return in August, 1597.

A few weeks later Amsterdam was stirred anew by the account of Willem Barents' adventures and death, when the crew returned without their captain from a winter spent among the snow and ice of Nova Zembla after vainly attempting to find a north-east passage to China and the Indies. Says Fabian to Sir Andrew in *Twelfth Night*: "You are now sailed into the North of my lady's opinion, where you will hang like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard." If the fame of this arctic exploit found an echo on the London stage, it must have rung through the streets of Amsterdam and sent a thrill through the heart of every boy. To rub an elbow with the tarry breeches of those heroes, to shake the hand of one who had seen Barents die and helped to heave the dead body into its sea-deep grave, to listen to their stories of fights with polar bears and monsters of the sea would be an education for any child's poetic fancy. We do not know whether the boy Vondel had the good fortune to be thus taught and entertained. A stranger in that new, exciting scene, he may have lacked the forwardness and self-assertion of his city-born comrades. But his avidity to know, which was a passion with him all his life, may have led him to the book shops along the waterside above the New Bridge, which had an ever varying supply for sale of the marvelous voyages compiled from logbooks or private diaries. There, in 1596, could he find copies exhibited of Jan Huygen van Linschoten's famous *Itinerario*, relating his voyage to the Orient or Portuguese Indies. There was, at the sign of the Copy-book, the printing-house and store of Cornelis Claesz who, in 1598, published Gerrit de Veer's *Veracious Description of three navigations, the strangest*



*ever heard of in this world*, containing the story of Barents' and Heemskerck's wintering in Nova Zembla, and Willem Lodewijksz' *History of India*, being the faithful account of De Houtman's voyage to Java by one who had taken part in that adventure on board the ship *Amsterdam*. Such books had the twofold charm of poignant actuality and colorful romance. They were the thrillers of an age that was but scantily supplied with literary fiction, and their truth was stranger than any fiction of which the literary genius of Holland was then capable. Among Vondel's early essays in poetry is a "Hymnus on the Far-famed Navigation of the United Netherlands," in which the poet, then grown to manhood, sings the praise of those modern Argonauts whose names were on everybody's tongue when he was a boy in Amsterdam. About seven years later the same theme inspired him to a second song in praise of the seafaring craft and of the city which, thanks to the sailor's enterprise and daring, had become the "mart of Christendom." The wealth of knowledge and imagination amassed in his poetic oeuvre was part of the profit that the merchants of Amsterdam brought to that market. The dealers in raw materials and commodities were, unconsciously, more than mere purveyors of the necessities of life. They were importers also of new ideas and emotions, the raw material, intangible though no less real, for the products of science, of art, of poetry.

But it was not only for the picture of exotic regions reflected to the imaginative gaze in the mirror of her waterfront swarming with ships, it was also for the picture she presented herself that Amsterdam had a strange fascination for the young immigrant poet. The

city was then as old as New York is now, and the need and passion for innovation which are always strong in a thriving and intensely active community had spared more of its visible past than modern business has left, in the twentieth century, of old New Amsterdam. A pious regard for the legacy of their ancestors was, probably, as little a weakness of its Calvinist rulers as it is with the average business man on Manhattan island. The past was Roman Catholic and what remained of it in the city's architecture held, for that reason, no cherished associations. Its buildings were preserved because they could, without much cost and difficulty, be adapted to the requirements of the new age. The Churches of St. Nicholas and St. Catherine had been stripped of everything reminiscent of the saints, and turned over to the Reformed Church. The Convent of St. Cecilia had become the headquarters of the Admiralty of Amsterdam and served, besides, as a hostel for the reception of worshipful guests of the city. The church of the convent of St. Agnes had been turned into an arsenal of the Admiralty, and the convent of St. Ursula did service as a reformatory for unruly girls and women, who were there taught "to shun idleness, begging, and vagrancy." With the nuns of *Marienkamp* and the Franciscan sisters of *Ter Lelien* the authorities had concluded an accord under which they ceded to the city all their real estate to be used for hospital premises, in return for lifelong maintenance of all the nuns at the city's cost. Thus a large part of the mediaeval town still survived at the end of the sixteenth century, and when Vondel, in his riper years, felt himself drawn to



the Mother Church, he loved to refresh his boyhood recollections and, with their help, to visualize the Amsterdam of the days before the Reformation.

His parents settled in the very heart of that mediaeval section which lay on the east side of the Amstel round the Church of St. Nicholas, the city's patron saint. The *Oude Zijde*, the Old Side, that section was called. The *Warmoesstraat* was the Main Street of this quarter, a main street that had nowhere its like in any town of Holland. There the drapers exhibited their wares, costly silks from France and the Orient, the expensive cloths of Dutch manufacture, and the coarser frieze for a more modest purse. There were, too, the showrooms of the jewelers and the goldsmiths, of the hatters and the hosiers, and of the various purveyors to the wealth and vanity of an opulent populace. Each house had its individual façade and the owner stressed its individuality by painting his device on the swinging signboard or having it carved on a white stone fixed into the wall. The two clasped hands on the sign that marked old Vondel's silk store were an emblem of Trust, and to judge by the rapid growth of his business, the customers of Vondel Senior did not deride this emblem as a vain pretence. At the south end of the *Warmoesstraat* was the market section of the city, a crowded quarter alive with the yells of the fish-wives praising their wares, encouraging hesitant customers in coarse terms of persuasion, and making the niggardly the butt of their abuse and of their gossips' derisive sneers. Amid this indecorous scene of human bustle, the market stork, employed by the city as a scavenger, seemed the only dignified creature as,

with slow, measured strides he went his beat between the fish stalls, picking up the slithery refuse on his way. The sea-fish market occupied the high-arched bridge across the Amstel which connected the *Oude Zijde* with the *Dam*, the spacious square where stood the city hall and the public weighhouse. The municipal government was the impartial third party that decided the weight of all merchandise in order to forestal any dispute between seller and buyer. The wares were taken to the scales on little sledges drawn by one horse, and the clatter of the hoofs on the cobbles, the shouts of the drivers, the cracking of whips, the sing-song with which the weighhouse porters timed their mechanical motions in heaving the bales and barrels and chests from the sledge on to the scales, made the *Dam* one of the city's busiest places. Here, too, always gathered the greatest concourse of people, for at the *Dam* the main arteries of the old city converged. And when the steadily growing population necessitated repeated expansion during Vondel's lifetime, it was on the *Nieuwe Zijde*, the New Side, west of the *Dam*, that new canals were dug to drain the water from the swampy fields and make them fit for habitation. Thus a triple semicircle of canals bordered by rows of homes of the wealthy and the well-to-do were to add a new quarter and new beauty to Amsterdam, which made it one of the most admired cities of Europe.

It was not its beauty, however, that attracted foreigners in the early seventeenth century. The aesthetic traveler is a product of the age of Romanticism which has been cultivated since by nineteenth century educa-

tion. The globe trotter of those earlier days was impelled by curiosity, by the desire to add to his store of knowledge and, incidentally, to polish his manners. Not scenery and architecture, but the people and their customs, laws, and institutions, were the objects of his interest. Amsterdam was a marvel to the foreigner for its prodigious growth from a small town to a European metropolis. "I am lately arriv'd in Holland in a good plight of Health," wrote James Howell to his father on May 1, 1619, "and continue yet in this Town of *Amsterdam*, a Town, I believe, that there are few her Fellows, being from a mean Fishing-Dorp come in a short revolution of time, by a monstrous increase of Commerce and Navigation to be one of the greatest Marts of Europe." Persistent industry, conscientious application to their work, courage steeled by their stubborn struggle against the Spaniard, self-confidence gained by their triumph over the enemy, were the qualities that aided the people of Amsterdam in accomplishing the incredible. But these alone could not explain so signal a success. The Hollanders of Vondel's time did not presume to claim sole honor for it. They were themselves amazed at their good fortune, and could account for it in no other way than as the work of divine providence. *Helpt nu u self, soo helpt u Godt*, began one of those hymns of defiance that were like clarion calls to the rebels against Spain. Their firm belief that courageous self-help would find its reward in the help of Heaven kept them from despair in their trials and from overbearing pride in their success. Nor did they forget that the freedom and prosperity which, by God's aid, had become theirs, were

not given them that they should selfishly keep them like a miser jealously guarding his hoard. They were glad to welcome the persecuted from other countries, the victims of tyranny and intolerance, the Jews who were expelled from Spain, the Brownists from Great Britain, the refugees from the southern Netherlands. Amsterdam, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, was inhabited by as cosmopolitan a population as is New York at the present day. A wise policy aiming at the city's economic welfare was the basis of this tolerance. Intellect, enterprise, and labor which other countries recklessly ejected enriched the city in return for its hospitality. Useless wreckage, to be sure, was also washed in on this tide of immigration. Of the sixteen hundred destitute households living on the *Oude Zijde*, in the early seventeenth century, seven-eighths were foreigners, according to the historian Pontanus. "And yet," says James Howell, "it is a rare thing to meet with a Beggar here, as rare as to see a Horse, they say, upon the *Streets of Venice*; and this is held to be one of their best pieces of Government: for besides the strictness of their Laws against Mendicants, they have Hospitals of all sorts for young and old, both for the relief of the one, and the employment of the other." In their care for the neglected child and the potential criminal the Amsterdam magistrates were pioneers as they were in religious toleration. Over the gate of the *Spinhuis*, the Spinning House or Reformatory for unruly girls, established in the old Convent of St. Ursula, an inscription composed by the poet Pieter Cornelisz Hooft concisely defined the charitable purpose of this prison:

Fear not, I venge no wrong, I force to good.  
Hard is my hand, but gentleness my mood.

There was a similar institute for culprits of the other sex, who were there taught various trades and handicrafts in order to reclaim them for the common weal.

Thus order was severely, but charitably, maintained in a community whose many foreign elements were not yet absorbed by the native population. The first immigrants lived in isolated communities round their places of worship, but their children, who had no knowledge or no recollection of the scenes of their origin, drifted easily away from that anchorage into the wider life of Amsterdam and found there a haven as safe as their parents had inside the narrower pale. Howell's first letter to his father, written in 1619, gives evidence of the intermixture that was at work to make Dutch compatriots of Frenchman, Briton, and Portuguese Jew. "I am lodg'd," he wrote, "in a Frenchman's House who is one of the Deacons of our *English Brownists Church* here; it is not far from the *synagogue* of *Jews*, who have free and open exercise of their Religion here." Nor was it far from the *Warmoesstraat* either, where Vondel lived among native Amsterdammers and fellow refugees from Brabant. "How like we were to lose our Language and our name of English," said Winslow in mustering the reasons that induced the Pilgrim Fathers to bid farewell to the hospitality of the Dutch. But Vondel, to whom the native language was no foreign tongue, and to whom the name of Dutch applied no less than to the citizens of Amsterdam, had nothing precious to preserve that he was there in danger of losing. The treasure which he brought, the gift of poetry, was given him to

spend, and in the city of his adoption he found an object worthy of his munificence. For nowhere, within the region where Dutch is spoken, could he have felt his soul so powerfully stirred by the breath of life that must fan the divine spark into flame.

## II.

### AMONG THE BRABANDERS IN AMSTERDAM

To judge from the little that we know about Vondel in his youth and early manhood, he remained for a long time a Brabander among the Amsterdammers, finding his friends and associates exclusively among the refugees from Antwerp and other places in the south. The Brabanders were not popular in Amsterdam. Though the Dutch of the Southern and Northern Netherlands spoke one language, though common suffering under the lash of the Spaniard had revealed to their own hearts the relationship that their speech made audible to the foreigner's ears, a profound difference in temperament kept them apart. The Brabander and Fleming are an emotional race, the Hollander is quiet and self-contained. The revolt against Spain had flamed up in the south, but the fire had soon spent its strength and left nothing but dead ashes. The north had been slower to stir, but, once aflame, it burnt with a fierce and steady glow before which the power of Spain melted away. The different outcome of the war in north and south had emphasized the contrast to which it was partly due. The Amsterdammer was aware of the Brabander's easier command of the language, eloquence and fluency of speech being much more common in the south than in the north; he knew him to be his superior in politeness of manners,



in grace of bearing, and in taste for apparel and finery. The Hollarder was naturally shy and awkward, and lacked the southerner's *savoir-vivre*. In an Antwerp morality of 1561, Dame Idleness is studying a ceremonious gait: "Am I doing it well?" she enquires from Dame Waywardness, who answers with a sneer, "Yes, you walk like a Holland wench." But conditions had changed since then, and the smart, show-loving Brabander was now living, a reedy refugee, among the wealthy boors and wenches of Holland, whom he used to despise. The Amsterdam people had acquired self-confidence with their money and new-won freedom and felt instinctively an implied criticism of their own manners and customs in the different manners and customs of their guests. In self-defence, or self-justification, they repaid the traditional derision of the past with the same coin. The Antwerp speech, with its broad *o* sound for the *a* of the Hollander, with its *ai*, like the cockney's, for the other's thinner *ei*, with its profusion of French loanwords, and its quaint repetition of the first personal pronoun, *ekik* instead of *ik*, resembling the frog's croak, became the butt of popular ridicule. In Bredero's *Farce of the Cow* (1612) the drunken farmer brags that he has not been a rhetorician with the Flemings without something to show for it, whereupon he recites an old-fashioned roundel full of French bastard terms that must have caused no small amusement among the Amsterdam audience. The Brabander's love of finery, his flaunting manners, his pretence at Spanish ceremoniousness, were parodied on the stage by the same playwright. It was bad taste on the part of the host thus to mock those to whom he gave shelter. But there was no hatred



in the grin. The two were like brothers in the same family who quarrel for lack of patience with each other. We cannot stand idiosyncrasies of our nearest and dearest which in strangers we are willing to overlook.

The Vondels belonged to a staid and modest class of Braband people, in whom the traits that annoyed the Hollanders were not thus prominent. But Brabanders they were, none the less, by the testimony of their speech. And while this provincial antagonism lasted, the Vondel household met probably with little friendship outside the limited circle of their Braband acquaintance. Among the notarial documents relating to Vondel's intimate circle is a contract between the grandmother and the guardians of some minors—Vondel senior acting as the grandmother's witness—under which the parties agree "to deposit the children's property with such persons as are considered trustworthy by all the signatories, each pledging security to the others for the safety of the capital." They evidently wished to conceal from the authorities where the money was kept, trusting to each other's good faith rather than to hand its custody over to the public guardians of minor orphans. They had purchased their citizenship, but they did not yet possess it. Money could procure them the title, but the proud feeling of ownership, which makes for public spirit and trust in the common weal, was a thing of slow growth. They were still a clan more anxious to preserve the intimacy they had inherited than to claim the full enjoyment of the citizenship which they had bought.

Vondel's earliest literary associations were with the clan. His first-known poem, a clumsy effort in the manner of the Braband rhetoricians, celebrates the wedding

of another native of Cologne who, like Vondel, was of the Baptist persuasion. His first dramatic attempt, *The Pascha or the Rescue of the Children of Israel from Egypt*, appeared in print in 1612, with a dedication in French verse to "Mon-Seigneur Jean Michiels van Vaerlaer, mon singulier ami," another immigrant of Antwerp descent whose cradle had stood in Cologne. And it was in the Brabanders' Chamber of Rhetoric that this play, before its production in print, was successfully staged.

Chambers of Rhetoric were a kind of theatre guilds which, like the labor guilds, had their origin in church organizations. But of their early connection with the Church the Amsterdammers of Vondel's time had no suspicion. To them the Chambers were societies of poets, rhymesters, and men of literary taste, who in their meetings combined the worship of Bacchus with the service of Apollo. The worshippers were, apparently, more numerous than the servants, for a common saying among the people made of the *rederijkers kannekiijkers*, of eloquent poets look-in-the-pots. In a memorial of the Baptist Church to which Vondel belonged an entry of the year 1614 records that two of the deacons were sent to a certain Cornelis Jansen "to admonish him for his alleged frequenting of the Chamber of Rhetoric, of which he is even said to be president." The culprit did not deny the charge, expressed his regret that he had caused any annoyance by his association with the Chamber, and promised to withdraw at the next election of officers.

The Calvinists thought little better of the rhetoricians. It was not only their love of the stoup that was frowned upon by the ministers, the very art which was the pur-

pose, or at least the pretext, for their gatherings was to their discredit. A survival of the former association of the Chambers with the Church was their cult of the drama, which in the Netherlands, as in all other countries, took its rise in the ritual of the Roman service. Although the drama, by divorcing itself from the Church, had followed the same course as the Calvinists, these were not willing to accept it, in its reformed condition, as an ally or a friend of kindred spirit. They were more hostile to it than the Catholic Church, after the drama's defection, had ever shown itself towards the runaway. The consistories frowned upon the theatre as a sinful amusement, and since the Chambers of Rhetoric, in the early seventeenth century, were the only purveyors of dramatic entertainment, little love was lost between the consistories and the chambers.

Vondel, though so respected a member of the Baptist congregation as to be elected one of its deacons in 1616, was nevertheless not willing to join in the general censure of the stage. We know from his preface to *The Pascha* that the play was enacted before it was published, and to judge from its closing words, which contain an allusion to the Brabanders' Chamber, the members of the clan had the first view of it. Vondel had probably joined that poets' guild, no little proud to be associated with celebrities whose twinkling fame would soon be dimmed in the glory of his rising sun. In 1606 the Braband rhetoricians were invited by the authorities of Haarlem to take part in a dramatic competition between rival chambers of other towns and villages of Holland, and Vondel, to judge from a reference to these festivities of half a century later, in the preface to his drama

*Salmoncus* of 1657, accompanied his countrymen to Haarlem, as a member, no doubt, of the White Lavender, as their Chamber was called after its emblem. Twelve competitors had answered the summons, and, on the morning of October 22, they entered the city in joyous procession, each flourishing its banner with the Chamber's blazon and device, and the members attired in allegoric mummery. All the plays were subsequently published in a quarto volume by Zacharias Heyns, a member of the White Lavender, who prefixed to each drama an engraving showing the manner of the competing chambers entering the city. There is a faint resemblance in the face of the youth who carries the banner of the Amsterdam Brabanders to the features with which we are familiar from portraits of Vondel in later life, and none among the younger rhetoricians was, indeed, more worthy to carry the Chamber's ensign than he who was destined to become the standard bearer of Holland's poetry.

Zacharias Heyns was in 1607, the year when his book saw the light, a printer and bookseller in Zwolle, the capital of the province of Overijssel, on the east shore of the Zuiderzee. But before he settled in that town he was a printer in Amsterdam and doubtless an acquaintance of the Vondels. The younger man's admiration for Du Bartas' *La Sepmaine* was shared by Zacharias Heyns, who probably introduced him to that poem, and both men tried their hand at a translation of its verse into Dutch. Another poet of the Brabant circle was Carel van Mander, who lived in Amsterdam from 1604 until his death two years later. He was the most gifted and versatile talent among the Brabant refugees, a

painter of historical and mythological scenes in the Italian manner, a designer of motifs for tapestries and damasks, a writer of Biblical dramas which may have served as models for Vondel's *Pascha*, a translator, from the Latin, of the *Iliad*, and of Virgil's *Bucolics* and *Georgics*, an expounder, in verse, of a theory of art, and—his greatest distinction in the eyes of posterity—the author of the *Lives of Eminent Dutch Painters*. The esteem in which he was held during his life may be judged by the manner of his obsequies. He was laid in the coffin with a wreath round his head and, on the shoulders of eight men, carried to his grave in the Old Church with great ceremony and a train of more than three hundred mourners. Vondel cannot have failed to be one of them. For Van Mander, besides being his countryman, was also of the Baptist persuasion, and the young poet was an admirer of the painter's devotional verse, which he imitated in his earliest rhymes. Half a century later, when, on a visit to Denmark, Vondel met at Copenhagen Carel van Mander's grandson and namesake, court painter to King Frederick III, the memory of the great man, thus revived, took permanent form in a short poem which Vondel wrote under an engraved portrait of the painter in the grandson's possession. Vondel's nature was reverently conservative. The devotions of his youth remained dear to him in later life, if not for any permanent inspiration, yet for the memory of what they had meant to him in the days of his poetic apprenticeship.

Another inspirer of his youthful efforts was Willem Bartjens, schoolmaster in Amsterdam, and the writer of a ciphering-book that has made his name immortal.

Generation after generation has learnt the mysteries of calculation from Bartjens' repeatedly "Renovated Ciphering," and posterity repaid him for his instruction thus continued from beyond the grave by giving currency to the proverbial saying "he can cipher like Bartjens" as the highest praise of a man's proficiency in that art. The schoolmaster's father is on record in 1592 as having come to Amsterdam from Xanten, north of Cologne, and probably belonged to the thousands of Brabanders who found a temporary refuge on the Rhine before they settled permanently in Holland. The son found his friends among the friends of the Vondels. He wrote a sonnet in praise of Vondel's *Pascha*, Van Mander painted for him a landscape "full of well-shaped trees and farm houses, the figures in it being Christ and his Apostles purifying the nine lepers," and Vondel praised him in a song as the wizard from whose art the commerce of Amsterdam drew its life and prosperity. Bartjens obtained a license, in 1591, to open a school in the *Pijlsteeg* near the *Warmoesstraat*, where Joost van den Vondel may have been among his pupils. This master of figures was an expert also in figures of speech. He called the young poet of *The Pascha*, in his sonnet on that drama, "a good Helicon clerk," and the clerk returned the compliment in his song to the master by calling him "a heavenly light," and a cause of pride to both the Y and the Amstel. Van Mander wrote an ode for the first edition, of 1604, of Bartjens' *Ciphering*, and Vondel's song was evidently written for insertion in a later installment, both poems agreeing in their description of an allegorical print which must have adorned the title page of the earliest issues,



Vondel was often employed at this time in lending the aid of his poetry to advertise the printer's ware. Abraham de Koning, another Brabander, and a prominent member in the White Lavender, turned the talents of the promising youth to similar account. For De Koning was "Art dealer at the Exchange in the King's Hat," and a printer of engravings so full of allegorical detail and mythological framework that they needed a poetical commentary to be fully understood. Vondel's *Hymnus on the Far-famed Navigation of the United Netherlands* was made to order, to be sold with an elaborate view of Amsterdam, showing the city in its full extent, with all its towers and spires and prominent buildings, and the Y in the foreground, where seven ships, representing the seven United Netherlands, ride at anchor. A young woman, called The Country's Welfare, sits enthroned on the clouds in the centre of this scene. She holds a frigate in her lap, faith and piety are seated to the right and left of her, the escutcheon of Amsterdam lies at her feet, between the portraits of Willem Barents and Jacob van Heemskerk, the heroes of the Nova Zembla expedition. Angels hover on either side of this allegorical centre-piece, holding up to view the pictures of four important sea-towns of the Republic. Thus artist, engraver, and printer joined in catering to the patriotic pride of the citizens, and the poet's aid was called in to give their mute picture a voice. Another print that was published by De Koning showed the Christian Knight fighting the World and Satan. It was engraved by Peter Serwouters after a drawing of David Vinckboons, both natives of Braband who had found a refuge in Amsterdam. Vondel's *Hymn of the Christian Knight*

was doubtless its poetical corollary. Serwouters also engraved the title page for *The Golden Shop of the Art-loving Netherlands*, another work of Vondel's days of poetic apprenticeship, and Vinckboons designed the vignette for Vondel's *Amsterdam Hecuba*, a drama of 1626. All his early associations show his dependence on the help and friendship of fellow refugees. They were, as Van Mander and Bartjens, the models he admired and imitated, or, as Vinckboons and Serwouters, his collaborators in art, or, as Van Vaerlaer and De Koning, his patrons and employers.

To be thus employed in the purveying of verse was, in his eyes, no prostitution of the Muse. The artist who painted a portrait to order did not lose his self-esteem. Why, then, should the poet? His talent was given him to use in the service of his fellow-men, and to accept remuneration for such service was as little beneath his dignity as the acceptance of a royalty would injure a modern poet's sensitive pride. It was the chief income from his art. The profits from the sale of his books disappeared into the pockets of the publisher, or, as Jeremias de Decker expressed it, "The poet sows and plants, the printer mows and plucks." Caspar Barlaeus, the historian and Latin scholar, a personage of higher social standing than the silk merchant Vondel, exposed even the dignity of his Latin Muse to the disgrace of mercenary service. But he excused himself and her by pleading that it does not behoove a virtuous man to despise an honorable reward and that a wise man need not be averse to the glorious gifts of the gods. The gods of his Latin bombast were the wealthy patrons among Holland's bourgeois aristocracy, whose demand for the



poet's praise was limited to occasions of domestic import, such as birthdays, weddings, and deaths. A curious contract has been preserved, concluded in 1622 between Jan Janszen Starter, a born Londoner who became a Dutch poet of no mean talent, and twenty members of Amsterdam's *jeunesse dorée*, who promised to pay to Starter a weekly stipend of twelve carolus guilders (\$12) on condition that he should remain in the city and "give them full access to everything he may make or has made and to write for them poems at three stivers the page." Vondel never sold himself thus hand and foot, but he, doubtless, accepted payment for the many epithalamiums, birthday songs, and elegies that are printed among his oeuvre. He wrote five nuptial songs in the heyday of his poetic career, between 1655 and 1662, each of one hundred verses. As the acknowledged prince of poets he could evidently afford to charge for his effusions by the line, but not to scorn the fee as unworthy of his princely honor. Much less could the novice whose fame had hardly spread beyond the Brabant colony presume to be above employment by the printers.

*The Golden Shop of the Art-loving Netherlanders* was one of those early works that had their origin in no poetic inspiration but in a publisher's initiative. Dirk Pietersen Pers, poet, printer, and publisher, wanted to bring out a new edition of a book of emblems of which he had bought the original plates. But the poems by Jan Moerman that went with the pictures in the edition of 1584 were too clumsy and old-fashioned to suit the developed taste of his Amsterdam custom, and he had them remodeled by Vondel, to whom he was probably

introduced by Zacharias Heyns. The job was evidently done to the printer's satisfaction, as four years later he employed the poet again to illustrate with his verse a series of copper plates which a Flemish artist, Marcus Geraerts, had made for a book of fables published at Bruges in 1567. Pers, having purchased the plates, had Vondel furnish the poetry. He was a man of thirty at that time. But his fables are not the work of a matured poetic talent. The pictures of Geraerts are still a delight to look at, the poems are a negligible accompaniment.

Vondel's genius had a slow growth. If he had died at that age, he would be remembered as a literary hack of some talent, but not worthy to be compared with Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft and Gerbrand Adriaenszen Bredero, both natives of the city and the outstanding poets in the Amsterdammers' Chamber,—the Old Chamber so-called to distinguish it from the new one that the Brabanders had founded. Its blazon was an eglantine whose stem and spreading branches formed a crucifix, and *In Liefde Bloeiende*, Flourishing in Love, was its device. The breath of the new life that blew through the city had no vivifying effect upon the White Lavender. It remained a sickly plant, for it was rooted in the poetic tradition of the South, which was a soil overworked and exhausted by the rhetoricians of the sixteenth century. But the Amsterdam poets, with no local tradition to guide them, opened the windows of their Chamber and their own young hearts to the life-bringing breeze of a new spring. It blew the strains of a new music from distant shores to their eager ears. Hooft, a burgomaster's son and a far-traveled man before his

twentieth birthday, was the first in Amsterdam to write sonnets in imitation of Petrarch. There had been sonnetteers in the southern Netherlands before his day, but none of these predecessors ever attained the flawless excellence of Hooft's melodious verse. He drove the hackneyed allegories of the rhetoricians off the stage—Dame Obedience, Old Avarice, Pride, Innocence, a motley crowd of soulless puppets—and gave it over to the wooings and the dances of swains and nymphs from sunny Arcady, or to the heroes of the nation's past, and with his brother poet Bredero he taught the Greeks of Plautus' and Terence's comedies to change their Latin for the speech of Amsterdam and act their parts as burghers of that city. Hooft's superiority was readily granted by his rivals of the Braband Chamber. Abraham de Koning said of him, in 1615, with a play on his name, "that the Muses had declared him to be *Hoofd der Poëten*," Head of the Poets, and the Muses must have perpetrated the pun because it happened to square with the truth.

There was one member in the Old Chamber, the dramatist Theodore Rodenburgh, who was less willing than De Koning to repeat the Muses' quibble, not from any fear lest it should harm their reputation but from a firm belief in his own greater worth. Though the Chamber in its device boasted of its flourishing in love, there was little harmony between the members. Hooft, Bredero, and Samuel Coster, a physician who was also a dramatist of some talent, rebelled against the mediævalism which still obtained in the Chamber. The new art that they were striving after found no room for expansion within the narrow limits set by sixteenth

century traditions. Hooft pleaded in 1611 for the building of a larger stage befitting the city's dignity, which had grown with the growth of its population, and Coster and Bredero felt that the public were entitled to more than the Chamber could give them, not entertainment alone, but also useful knowledge. They wanted to bring the means of study to the unlettered and give the possessors of small Latin and less Greek an opportunity of cultivating both. They had in mind a Dutch Academy for higher education, where all subjects should be taught in the mother tongue, instead of in Latin as at Leyden.

Theodore Rodenburgh, however, did not see the necessity for that new departure. His plays, he claimed, were a school of polite learning, as the *dramatis personae* discoursed entertainingly about ethics, history, geography, geology, astrology, a whole catalogue of edifying knowledge. Bredero ridiculed this didactic drama "in whose grandiloquent rhymes kitchen wenches and ostlers philosophize about such profound mysteries as the motion of the stars, or the drift of heaven, or the size of the sun, and other unfathomable matters, which I consider to be evidence of the author's learning rather than typical of that sort of people."

Rodenburgh was half a Brabander, although of old Amsterdam stock. At the time of his birth his parents were living in Antwerp, and from his native place he had brought to his ancestral city the mannerisms and the braggadocio which the Amsterdammers disliked in the Braband refugees. He was a man of many parts, and probably well suited for the diplomatic career on which he entered in 1611 after a four years' residence in

Amsterdam. Vondel must have known him by that time, for he was then associated with the White Lavender, feeling evidently more of a Brabander than an Amsterdammer. He went to Spain as an agent of Dutch commercial interests, and came back in 1615 proudly parading a knighthood in the order of the House of Burgundy. During the next four years he developed, as a member of the Amsterdam Chamber, a literary productivity which earned him from his enemy, Samuel Coster, the nickname of *dosynwercker*, a worker by the dozen. He had the ambition to become the Netherlands Lope de Vega, with whose works he had become acquainted in Madrid, and though he failed to equal the Spanish dramatist in talent, he made up for that deficit by the quantity produced. Being connected with the best families in Amsterdam, and imposing his friends with the lustre of his knighthood, he was able to marshal a large following in the Chamber, "wild rascals and puffed-up fools," in the opinion of Bredero. The three talents of the Eglantine withdrew from their fellowship and started in the autumn of 1617 the Dutch Academy which was to raise learning from a clumsy handmaid of the drama to the drama's independent equal, to the greater dignity of both.

Vondel must have followed with keen interest this family quarrel in the rival Chamber. He was then a man of thirty, with his critical faculty sufficiently developed to appreciate the greater worth of the three Academists. We find him, nevertheless, writing a poem in praise of Rodenburgh's play of *Cassandra*, and receiving the latter's tribute as a "God-fearing, devotional, and art-loving poet." His early association with the

Knight in the order of Burgundy, when the latter was one of the Braband Chamber, was yet the only link between him and the Amsterdam poets. Vondel was a successful man of business, and doubtless better known, outside his immediate circle of friends, as the silk mercer at the Sign of the Clasped Hands in the Warmoesstraat than as the poet of *The Pascha*. He was at the head of the business. His father had died in 1608, and in 1613 the widow had sold her part in the shop of her eldest son for an amount that speaks well for the success of the concern. His mother moved out of the old house, leaving Joost and his young wife in sole possession of the place where she had lived and ruled for nearly seventeen years. Vondel's marriage had not widened the circle of his acquaintance. For Maria, or Mayken, de Wolff was the sister of Hans de Wolff, who had married Vondel's sister Clementia, and Hans and Mayken belonged to the Braband refugees who, like the Vondels, had come to Amsterdam after a period of exile in Cologne.

It was a narrow horizon that bounded his view from where he sat behind his counter, and narrower still was the sphere in which his verse had a familiar ring. Bredero died in 1618, at the age of thirty-three, leaving a book of songs and a volume of dramas that have secured him immortality. Vondel, his junior by two years, had not yet written any of the works on which his fame as a poet rests. He was invited, or volunteered, to contribute his mite of praise to the collection of elegies upon the death of the great playwright. His four lines do not express any grief over the loss of a friend: "Charon will carry him across in his old boat



for nothing, because he makes the dejected souls still laugh at his merry jests." The jolly spendthrift will have found small comfort in this *post mortem* offer of a gratuitous fare. Everything except his talent he had husbanded carelessly. The idea of Charon rewarding him with a chance for posthumous economy which in this life he would have scorned to seize did less justice to the dead poet whom it was meant to honor than it was characteristic of the living one by whom it was conceived.

Vondel, trained from his youth in the business methods of his parents, and, at the age of twenty-five, alone responsible for the management of the silk shop, had the making in him of an economist. He seems to have been as fond, in those days, of his store as of his poetry. In the same year in which his mother sold to him her part in the concern, he published *The Golden Shop of the Art-loving Netherlanders*, dedicated to his brother-in-law Abraham de Wolff, who was told by the poet that "he had here opened a Shop where the young folk will find offered to them at small price a valuable store of manifold preciousities." Thus Vondel the mercer employed Vondel the poet subtly to advertise his ware. He did not look upon his trade as a despicable drudgery by the touch of which his art would be defiled. He must have handled a precious pair of silk stockings with a connoisseur's love and an admiration of the fabric, akin to the fondness with which he savored the phrasing and the rhythm of a melodious line. Life in his days was more harmonious than ours; the contact with the common reality did not mock so crudely a man's inner perception of what should be or might be. In their homes,



even the humblest, the people were surrounded by things that bore the stamp of beauty because they were the products of an artisan's love for his craft. Painters and poets did not shun the reflection of the actual in their work because, as artists, they took an equal delight in both. Who laughs at Vondel for starting life as a poet with the expression of a businessman's pride in the silks of his shop in the *Warmoesstraat* is unable to understand the mainspring of his poetry. An intense interest in the life around him made him sensible of the beauty there is in the commonest experience of every day, and the zest with which he went about his commercial task was one manifestation of that passion for existence which revealed itself more imposingly in the grandeur of his later poems.

To be active in the life of the world was a joy to him, to interpret its life in verse a necessity. He could have gone through life without its joy, but to abandon its interpretation would have been paramount to renouncing life. About 1620 he became a victim of melancholia, from which, after several relapses, he slowly recovered. When the doctor told the convalescent that he had better avoid the mental strain of writing poetry, he shook his head and said: "Rather tell me to die." That which stirred in the deep well of his heart rose to his lips with irrepressible force. The pressure grew with the years. Until his sickness most of his poetry, apart from the verse that was made to order, was of a devotional strain, expressive, in the later of these poems, of a mystic longing for the life with God. The vanity of human life and the instability of kingdoms, the Passion of Christ, the marriage between God and the be-

lieving soul, were the kind of theme that attracted him when grown to manhood. They reveal a state of mind opposed to that healthy zest for life which was the hidden force of Vondel's nature. It tinged even his praise of the heroes he admired with a touch of the Puritan's wrath at the overbearing pride of man. In his book of fables he spoke of the crew that wintered in Nova Zembla as madmen who dared to do the superhuman. The conflict between his religious longing and the robust urge of his physical being may have been the cause of that gloom which overcast his days when he approached the midway of his mortal life. When the struggle was over and the poet was freed from the doubts and misgivings that beset him, he had passed a turning-point in his career. Daring again to rejoice in the life of this world as a reflection, instead of a denial, of the life spiritual, he embraced it with a stronger and a broader love. It was then that he entered into the fellowship of the Amsterdam poets, and, like a native, into the spirit of Amsterdam's citizenship.

### III

#### THE MUYDEN CIRCLE

Among the oldest members of the Amsterdam Chamber was a wealthy merchant, Roemer Visscher, whose home, until his death in 1620, was the gathering-place of the wits and the talents of the city. He was a broad-minded man, too much of a Protestant to remain a Catholic, and not enough of a dogmatic to be a good Calvinist, a "Libertine," in short, as the Liberal of those days was called. Erasmus was his spiritual ancestor. He also shared with that great humanist a love for satire. But the edge of his weapon was rather blunt, and the wielder's thrusts lacked the other's incisive grace. The Dutch of his rhymes, though vigorous and robust, was not yet subtle enough to express unpleasant truths suavely, nor capable of that melodious charm which robs the mockery of its sting. He was far from being an austere moralist. Not the trespasses of his fellowmen, but their false pretences, not the joy of life, but the denial of its joy, were the butts of his sarcasm. The affectations of the phrase-monger and the zeal of the fanatic reformer were equally hateful to him. He felt them to be foreign to the Dutch character, which scorns disguises and extremes. And to be Dutch, in word and act, was the only pride of which his honest, humble heart was capable; to speak his native Dutch undefiled by

foreign mannerisms his chief ambition. By his riches he set small store:

O wealth! thou mother of evil fate,  
Wife of falsest treachery,  
Daughter of care, sister of hate,  
Nurse of all iniquity;  
Having thee, pale fears surround us,  
And, without thee, sorrows wound us.\*

He knew by experience the insecurity of worldly goods. To his daughter Maria he gave the quaint nickname *Tesselschade*, Texel damage, in memory of the loss of one of his ships wrecked off the Texel at the time when the child was born; and Tesselschade, or briefly Tessel, she remained through life to all the friends who knew and loved her.

Vondel became one of them about the time when Roemer Visscher and his wife prepared themselves to leave the scene of their hospitality. He wrote, in 1619, a poem on the birthday of Maria's older sister Anna, the first evidence of his acquaintance with Roemer's famous daughters. In that same year they lost their mother, and twelve months later Roemer Visscher was buried by her side in the Old Church of St. Nicholas. Vondel published in 1623 a second *Hymn in praise of Navigation*, which closes with a tribute to "blessed Roemer's home," the haunt of "painters and artists, of singers and poets." We do not know whether he ever entered it in the old man's lifetime, but he knew it after 1620, and knew the fair one who, with her sister Anna, had added charm and refinement to the somewhat boisterous conviviality that their father practised.

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\* Translation by John Bowring (1825).

Maria married a sea captain in 1623, and Vondel honored the event with an epithalamium in the grand renaissance manner, making Allard Crombalch's courtship of Maria the occasion of an Olympian feud between Juno and Apollo, the goddess being bent on binding the siren in wedlock who endangered Amsterdam shipping with her enrapturing song, the god being loath to lose the worship of his virgin priestess. Amsterdam was honored by this fabled concern of the Olymp in the city's matrimonial events, and the fable raised the poet's repute among the city's polite society. For a knowledge of Latin was a badge of good breeding, and the man who could work the mythological machinery in such imposing and ingenious fashion proved not only well bred but a poet born.

By his admission into the friendship of these two women and the circle of their acquaintance Vondel was introduced to a new world. To the late elder of the Baptist congregation, a pious but narrow-minded community that scowled on art and on the artist's joy in visible beauty, it must have been a revelation to enter a sphere where art and poetry were cultivated and a liberal spirit of tolerance prevailed. Anna was a versatile talent, skilful with brush and needle, an engraver on glass, and a writer of mostly emblematic verse. As a poetess she was excelled by her younger sister. Maria was the more worldly of the two, a charmer of men whom age never robbed of her charm. Bredero wooed her when she was a girl in her teens, Constantine Huygens, the poet-diplomat, and Caspar Barlaeus, the classical scholar, courted her in her widowhood. She exchanged

letters and poetry with Hooft, with whom she shared an admiration of Italian literature and a liking for the cultivation of an artificial style. She was praised by these friends for her translation into Dutch of Tasso's epic, and left a slender collection of verse, which contains a few gems of pure poetry.

Anna married, in 1622, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, who carried her off to his vicarage in a North Holland polder among peasants and farmers, and Allard Crombalch, in the following year, took his bride to Alkmaar, within easier reach of her literary friends. With Tesselschade's departure "blessed Roemer's home" lost its chief attraction. Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft, the "Head of the Poets," became Visscher's successor as the host of the wits and talents of Amsterdam. Prince Maurice of Nassau had appointed him, in 1609, Sheriff of Muyden and Het Gooi, a town and district south of Amsterdam. That office required his residence in the castle of Muyden, a mediaeval structure on the shore of the Zuiderzee rich in historic associations. There, especially from 1627, the year of his second marriage, until his death in 1647, the High Sheriff was wont to offer the choice spirits of Amsterdam good cheer at his table and good talk at his hearth. There Tesselschade, a frequent and his most welcome guest, was taught to smile away her widow's tears; there Daniel Mostaert, who, as secretary of Amsterdam, spent his hours making minutes of the burgomasters' meetings, made minutes of the hours spent in her company; there Laurens Reael, late Governor General of the Dutch East Indies, made little of his glorious career and much of

his amatory verse; there Cornelis Gijsbertsz Plemp, esteemed as an able jurist, was honored more as a Latin poet, and not less heartily welcomed than the others for being the only Roman Catholic; there Samuel Coster could give free play to his caustic wit, which he dared not do openly since the burgomasters had rebuked him for his diatribes against the Calvinist divines; there Hooft's brother-in-law, Joost Baeck, with his wife and sisters, made appreciative listeners; and there, after the foundation of the Amsterdam Athenaeum, in 1632, its two most illustrious scholars, Barlaeus and Vossius, found greater pleasure in the ephemeral talk of these moderns than in the printed silence of the ancients.

Vondel was not often among the guests, and when he was invited it was usually in reply to his own request that he might come and read a new poem to the High Sheriff. Hooft never admitted him to his intimacy, though he befriended him and honored him as a great poet. Still, Vondel belonged to the Muyden circle, as the gathering was called, for he was acquainted with each of its members and counted some among his dearest friends. We know from Vondel's biographer Brandt that, after his recovery from the fit of melancholia, he made such progress in the writing of poetry that "when compared with his former rhymes, his work seemed that of another man, which he owed, in part, to his frequent intercourse with Sheriff Hooft, Sir Laurens Reael, and other poets and connoisseurs of poetry, who came together for literary discussions." The main theme of these meetings, if we may believe Brandt, was not literature but the language: "They



agreed upon various rules which were to be observed in writing poetry, as to the construction of the sentence, the composition of verbs and nouns, the distinction of the genders, the case inflection, and the spelling of each word."

This care of the poets for the instrument on which they played their music was a characteristic feature of the renascence of letters. The study of classical Latin as Erasmus had taught it impressed the learned with its methodic conformity to fixed rules of grammar. The native language seemed, by comparison, a chaos of undisciplined sounds that needed the rigid control of a permanent standard. They loved their speech with the love of wise parents who fear to spare the rod lest they should spoil the child. But they loved it, in their wisdom, passionately. However great the glory and the beauty of Latin, the beauty of Dutch exceeded it, and to win for it glory which would match that beauty was their ambitious dream. Erasmus' cosmopolitan indifference to country was an attitude that their modernism had outgrown. The Reformation, which had destroyed the universality of the Roman Church, had thereby broken up the unity of Europe. The national spirit was everywhere aroused at the birth of the national churches, and the poets who, as men of letters and humanists, knew themselves to be the heirs of Erasmus, were, as proud builders of their native speech, the unconscious debtors of Luther and Calvin.

The fiercer the fervor with which the war for freedom of faith and country was fought, the prouder the expression of love for the native speech. At the beginning of

the war of independence against Spain, Johannes Goropius Becanus, an Antwerp physician, published at the press of Plantin his *Origines Antverpianae*, in which he proved to his own and his compatriots' satisfaction that the Germanic, which he called the Cimbric, language was the oldest on earth and had been spoken by our common parents in Paradise.\* After the conclusion of the twelve-years' truce of 1609, when the fierceness of the struggle had abated, and independence for the northern Netherlands was made secure, another Dutch scholar, Abraham van der Mijle, or Mylius, was willing to concede the priority of Hebrew, but claimed for his *Lingua Germano-Belgica*, the Germanic language, the honor of being the next in antiquity and the most widely diffused of all tongues. The Netherlander's native gift for speaking other peoples' languages was to him a confirmation of his theory: since those foreign tongues had derived from the Dutch, it was only natural that the Dutchman should find it easy to acquire a speech which, in its origin, was identical with his own. And having shown that the Dutch was superior in age to the Greek of Homer, he argued that it could not be inferior to it in fitness for poetical expression.

If that fitness was a fact, the poets were to blame for the little it accomplished. For no critic could deny the inferiority of Dutch literature to that of the ancients.

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\*Ben Jonson ridiculed this theory in *The Alchemist*:

|         |                                                                                                                                 |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mammon. | I'll shew you a booke where Moses, and his sister<br>And Salomon have written, of the art:<br>I, and a treatise penn'd by Adam. |
| Surly   | How?                                                                                                                            |
| Mammon  | O' the philosopher's stone, and in high-Dutch                                                                                   |
| Surly   | Did Adam write, sir, in high-Dutch?                                                                                             |
| Mammon  | He did:<br>Which proves it was the primitive tongue.                                                                            |

The cause for their failure was found in the corruption of the native tongue. It was no longer the undefiled speech of primitive days; foreign intrusions had impaired its purity and rendered it incapable of eloquent expression. "Not even then when we believe we speak Hollandish are we sufficiently Hollanders," wrote Hugo Grotius in one of his earliest works, "for we have infected our genuine and pure diction with an exotic medley of words." These foreign intruders emasculated the language, and their numbers had increased with the arrival of the thousands of Braband refugees, whose Dutch was even more corrupt than that of the people of Holland. The greatest praise, said Grotius, that could be given to any tongue was to call it capable of expressing one's thoughts in as short a time as possible, and that speech was, consequently, to be admired most in which fundamental ideas were expressed by words of one syllable. If scummed of its foreign impurities, the Dutch language would prove to be an eloquent speech, because of the admirable shortness of its native words. One could hear that in the speech of North-Holland, for this province retained, along with all other institutions of the past, the language in purer condition than other regions, nor did it know the defects of a diction borrowed from strangers. And this monosyllabic form of the radicals which made the language an efficient instrument gave it this other advantage of facilitating the formation of compound words. Even children at their games could form them without being aware that they created anything new. "Divine, indeed, is that language," Grotius concluded, "in which even children

have the freedom which Horace complained was denied to him, to Virgil, and to Varius!"

In these remarks of the young Grotius the programme was mapped out which was adopted by the leading Amsterdam poets for their own guidance. A puristic selection of the native radicals, the cultivation of a literary standard based on the North-Hollander's speech, and a careful study of word composition were to them essential conditions for the efflorescence of that great literature which they felt budding in their own endeavors. The founding of Coster's Academy was, again, in the line of Grotius' thoughts. For having made his plea for a purified language, he added a wish for its wider use. "If we all made up our minds to record matters of universal interest in our own language rather than aim at I know not what semblance of learning by the veneer of a foreign eloquence, we might declare our age, the most literary that one can possibly imagine, to be also the wisest of all ages. For all sciences have made the greatest progress when they were revealed to all in the native speech of every day. This was realized by the Greeks and by the Romans, and while we make use of their tongues we despise their very principle."

Grotius himself seldom attempted to practise what he preached. He praised Simon Stevin, the mathematician and teacher of Prince Maurice, for being the first to write of his science in the mother tongue, but most of his own writings were composed in Latin. The ideas, however, which he expressed bore fruit all the same. For they were shared by others who, endowed with less learning, did not feel the need or the ambition to address a European audience. Roemer Visscher and his fellow

members of the Eglantine, Jan van Hout, the learned secretary of Leyden, and his friends, Carel van Mander and his circle in Haarlem had discussed these questions in letters and at friendly symposia before Grotius discussed them in graceful Latin, and the Amsterdam Chamber published as early as 1584 a grammatical treatise on the Dutch language, thrown into the form of a dialogue between Roemer Visscher and his friend Gedeon Fallet. The literary conversations which Vondel had with Hooft, Reael, and other poets and connoisseurs of poetry were, therefore, no novelty, but in accord with a well-established tradition of nearly half a century's standing.

When Vondel was a man of over sixty and the undisputed successor to Hooft's title of Head of the Poets, he wrote "a rough sketch," as he called it, for a theory of poetic diction. This *Introduction to Dutch Poetry*, a precious specimen of Vondel's ornate prose style, contains the gist of the wisdom which at those meetings, in the early twenties, had sprung from the clash of their opinions. What they set out to do was by that time accomplished. The language had been scummed of un-Dutch trash and hybrids, and a standard speech had come into use among the educated at The Hague and Amsterdam. The younger poets were the gainers. For they could now glean a wealth of eloquence from the poems and writings of their late predecessors who themselves had labored hard without such aid. It was for those disciples that Vondel, from his rich experience, gave in his sketch a home-study course in the art of poetry.

"The would-be poet," he told them, "should study to

add every day to his store of knowledge in various branches of learning, and thus become informed, if not of all things perfectly—which no man can ever be—still of many things passably, so as to compose his work in proper fashion.” Learning, in the opinion of those days, was the twin sister of poetry. *Poeta nascitur, non fit*, one can not be made, one must be born, a poet; but the born poet who does not apply himself to scholarship is a squanderer of his genius. And scholarship, as it was understood in Vondel’s time, was the study of the classics. Though Grotius might break a lance, more in jest than in earnest, for the teaching of all sciences in the vernacular, though Samuel Coster founded a Dutch Academy to make earnest of the jest, the influence of Erasmus on the learned of Vondel’s age secured to Latin absolute sway within the walls of the university. The poets might follow the schismatic course of the reformers, and, even as these built up a national church, cultivate the native language, the scholars—with a few exceptions—refused to rebuild their Latin temple of learning into a tower of Babel. And since the poet, if he should succeed, must also be a scholar, the study of Latin was essential to his training.

There were at Amsterdam, in those days, two Latin schools which together were attended by about six hundred pupils. Vondel had never been one of them. His parents sent him to the French school, where no Latin was taught. But as he grew to manhood and became conscious of his poetic genius, he painfully felt what he missed, and practising the lesson which he taught in his old age to the rising generation, he set himself to study Latin grammar, eager “to add every



day to his store of knowledge." He had a brother, his junior by fifteen years, who about that time began to attend the Latin school. Joost and Willem may have pored together over the intricate periods of Cicero, the man's ripe judgment and the boy's quick wit assisting each other in solving their difficulties. That Willem was given the classical training which the older, gifted brother had been denied, has been taken as proof of a change for the better in the family's worldly prosperity. It was evidence, rather, of a change of mind, due, no doubt, to the influence of the eldest son, who, after old Vondel's death, was for a time the mother's business partner and adviser. Joost had a high opinion of his young brother's talents. Half a century after Willem's premature death—he died in 1628, less than two years after his return from abroad—Brandt heard the poet say of him, "I feel ready to cry when I think of my brother; he was easily my better." It had, indeed, been made easy for him to excel. A classical education, a year at Leyden to study law, two years of travel through France and Italy, were opportunities that had never been within the poet's reach. Joost's generous nature was incapable of envy. He was happy at his charge being able to visit foreign countries, he treasured his Latin epistles full of humor and picturesque description, he felt proud at hearing Hooft praise his beautiful Italian style. But while content to be excelled by Willem, he was spurred on by his excellence to emulate him. He must know Latin, he must study Italian, though the care for the business and a family did not allow him to visit Rome and Naples.

He learnt the rudiments of Latin grammar from an



Englishman, says Brandt, and continued his studies under a certain Abbama, master in the Latin school at the *Oude Zijde*. Brandt leaves us to guess at the Briton's identity. Amsterdam, in those days, was a refuge for the Brownists, and harbored also a number of English Presbyterians, to whom the city authorities had turned over the old church of the Beguines on the west side of the *Kalverstraat*. Among this English colony there was one English scholar of outstanding merit, who may have been Vondel's first Latin master: Matthew Slade. He had come to Amsterdam as a Brownist and had been one of the first elders of their congregation. But he left their prayers and their quarrels for the Dutch Reformed Church, and thus removed the bar which otherwise might have prevented his appointment to the rectorship of the Latin School at the *Oude Zijde*. Of all Englishmen then living in Amsterdam, he was the most likely to have been the Latin instructor of our poet. He may have taught him more than the rudiments of a dead tongue, and introduced him to the beauties of contemporary English. For Vondel is the only one among the Dutch poets of that period who tried his hand, occasionally, at a Shakespearian sonnet. While attempting to grasp the beauty of classical letters, he had, incidentally, a glimpse of a modern literature too faint, however, to reveal to him its surpassing beauty.

The classics remained to him the stars by which he steered his literary course. In the winter of 1622 he had so far advanced in the study of Latin as to undertake, with the help of Hooft and Reael, a rendering of Seneca's *Troades*. It was the first of a long series of translations from the ancients, which were to him practical exercises

in the difficult art of poetry. For, as he told his disciples in the *Introduction to Dutch Poetry*, "a knowledge of foreign languages is a great asset, and the translating from illustrious poets aids the would-be poet even as the copying of masterpieces of art speeds the painter's pupil." Vondel never considered himself too old to learn by imitation. At forty he gave in *Hippolytus or Fatal Chastity* (1628) a version of Seneca's *Phaedra*; at the age of fifty-two he published Sophocles' *Electra* in Dutch, when he was a man of nearly sixty he rendered Virgil in prose, and fifteen years later anew in Alexandrines; when over seventy he translated Sophocles' *King Oedipus* (1660), and as an octogenarian he gave two other Greek dramas, *Trachinian Maidens* (1666) and *Theban Brothers* (1668) to the public. At the age of eighty-four he concluded this series of translations from the classics with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Alexandrian verse. In the heyday of his genius he was never too proud to sit down at the feet of the great masters whom he believed to be greater than himself.

## IV

### A FIGHTING POET

Vondel's friendship with Laurens Reael caused a profound change in the poet's life. Reael belonged to an old Amsterdam family. His father, Laurens Jacobsz, i. e. Jacob's son, merchant at the sign of the Gold Real, had been one of the prominent citizens who, when the Duke of Alva came to the Netherlands, had left their native city of Amsterdam, deeming liberty in exile to be the real gold for which he was willing to part with the comforts that the Gold Real could give him. The Alteration of 1578 restored him to his former possessions and to a place of honor on the bench and in the city Council. The son's career took him farther away from home. The University of Leyden made him a Doctor of Law at the age of twenty-five, but instead of settling down to a practice, he chose a life of adventure and the log for the law book. He sailed, in 1611, for the Indies as commander of a squadron of four ships, rose in the service of the East India Company to the rank of Governor of the Moluccas, and, higher still, became the Company's Governor-General in 1616. Early in 1620 he was back in Holland. His administration had not given satisfaction to his employers. Too considerate for the natives, too yielding to the English, was their verdict. Men of a coarser fibre were needed for the pioneer's

work in the tropics. Urbanity, scruples, a love of letters, were a superfluous outfit for the conquistador. He belonged to Amsterdam not only by birth but by training, and, once settled in his native place, the adventurer who had fought Spaniard, Briton, and Malayan, found his best friends in the poets Hooft and Vondel.

Other interests beside their common love of poetry tied him to Vondel. They seem to have entered into partnership to carry on some kind of foreign trade the exact nature of which has not been ascertained. We only know that Vondel busied himself in other and apparently more ambitious pursuits in addition to the silk trade he had inherited from his father, pursuits important and promising enough to win for him as an associate the former Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies. Poetry and Commerce were the patrons of their friendship, and in days when commerce was an adventurous romance there was nothing incongruous in its union with poetry. Vondel's verse drew its breath from the life of the city, and the city's life was her commerce with the world.

We do not know what worldly profits came to our poet from his association with the warrior-merchant. But it was certainly owing to the relation with Reael that Vondel, from a shy, retiring poet of mostly devotional and occasional verse, became a fierce fighter for spiritual freedom, feared by his enemies for the sting and the power of his word. This entrance of Vondel in the open market-place as a champion of a public cause revealed him not only to the mass of his fellow-citizens: it revealed him also to himself.

At the time of Reael's return from the Indies, Holland

had just passed through a severe domestic crisis. The twelve years' truce with Spain, concluded in 1609, had not brought the temporary peace that the country needed. Religious dissension between compatriots had brought the country to the verge of a civil war. Orthodox Calvinists and the modernists of the age had clashed over the doctrine of predestination. The conflict caused a schism in the Dutch Reformed Church, and the modernist faction, the Arminians, thus called after their leader Arminius, professor of theology in Leyden, appealed for support to the States of the province of Holland. Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, the Lord Advocate of Holland, wanted to bring the matter before a synod of that province. But the orthodox party, the Gomarists, adherents of Professor Gomarus, insisted upon the calling of a general synod where all the seven provinces should be represented. For their following was stronger in Utrecht, Gelderland, and Friesland than in the province of Holland. In this way the theological controversy between two Leyden scholars became a nation-wide conflict of political import, as it involved the vexed question whether the sovereignty of the individual provinces or that of the States-General was paramount. Prince Maurice of Orange-Nassau, who as the commander of the army of the Republic and as stadtholder of five of the seven provinces was naturally a champion of the States-General's sovereignty, thus became the leader of the anti-Barnevelt party. Envious rivals and disappointed suitors of the Advocate found satisfaction for their grudges in rallying to the support of the Stadtholder, thus injecting the acidity of personal hatred into a conflict which was envenomed by religious intolerance

from the start. A general synod convened at Dordrecht and found the Arminians guilty of heresy. Their ministers were unfrocked and banished from the country, and orthodox Calvinism was proclaimed the pure and veritable creed. The defeat of the Arminians was part of the general onslaught on the Barneveldt faction. The Lord Advocate and his chief associates were arrested, these imprisoned for life, and he himself condemned to die on the scaffold, and his followers everywhere ousted from the magistracy. The Prince of Orange's military force had triumphed over the Advocate's political power, and, incidentally, the principle of united sovereignty over that of the individual province.

Vondel lived through these years of domestic strife and tragedy without any apparent reaction. His poetry of that period shows no reflection of the fire that burnt in the hearts of politician and preacher with so fierce a flame. In 1617 the house of Rem Egbertsz Bisschop, a leader of the Arminians in Amsterdam, was plundered by a Calvinist mob, Prince Maurice visited the city that same year to remove from its government such as were known to be partisans of Oldenbarnevelt; two years later the great Advocate of Holland was beheaded at The Hague and Hugo Grotius condemned to lifelong imprisonment. But Vondel never uttered a note of indignation. He still felt himself an alien who owed to his adoptive country a debt of gratitude involving his neutrality in the domestic conflict. It was not for him to pass judgment on the men in power; he saw in the Advocate and the Prince of Orange not the antagonists they were but the benefactors they had been to his people. His drama of *Jerusalem Destroyed* was published

in 1620 with a dedication to Cornelis Pietersz Hooft, Councillor and late Burgomaster of the city of Amsterdam, whom he addressed in these terms:

“When Saint Paul admonishes the Christians to pray for Kings and all those who sit in high and mighty state, that we may lead a still and quiet life in blessedness and honesty, he teaches us by implication that we must respectfully receive wise and pious magistrates as a great mercy of God and as a fountain through which happiness and prosperity flow to us. For, as an eminent philosopher remarks, that city shall be blessed where the magistrate pursues wisdom. Proof of this may be found in what happened, some years hence, in these our United Netherlands, which, with divine help, have happily sailed past so many dangers, thanks to the prudent and wise governance of their faithful and pious rulers. The noblest fruit of this labor is that many thousands of refugees were hospitably sheltered and lovingly cared for in the bosom and the territory of the august Lords, the States, so that, safely resting under cover, they need not fear any more the ferocity of the Spanish Alecto.”

These are not the words of a citizen—who was the son of a citizen—of Amsterdam, but the humble speech of an exile who thanks a kindly host for his reception. The war with Spain was to be resumed in the following year. The recollection of the cruelty from which his people had escaped, as he expresses it, “in their shirts,” was revived at the prospect of a resurgence of the Spanish fury. The good which they had received from the rulers of the Republic, not the evil that divided those rulers among themselves, was uppermost in the poet’s mind. And in his gratitude he saw them only united



in their past rôle of benefactors. But two years later the unjudging eulogist of the authorities had become a zealous partisan of the defeated, and the rhymester of didactic and devotional verse an inspired poet whom the fire of his indignation gave the courage and the power of expression.

The Reaels were the most prominent among Arminius' followers in Amsterdam. A sister of Vondel's friend had been the wife of the great Leyden professor, and a brother of his, Jacob Laurensz Reael, secretary to the Admiralty, remained loyal to the memory of his brother-in-law to the extent of suffering excommunication for obstinate adherence to his heresy. By proclamation of the Consistory of the Dutch Reformed Church of Amsterdam, he and nine other members were, on New Year's eve, 1623, excluded "from the community of Christ, from the Holy Sacraments, and from all spiritual blessings and divine benefactions." This matter had hung fire for several years. First a warning had been thrown from the pulpit at random, like the proverbial cap for those to wear whom it should fit, then they had been mentioned by name, and had been visited and admonished by ministers and elders, but as they remained obstinate and repulsed these approaches with scorn and contempt, they were at last cut off from the body as limbs diseased and infectious. That is the story as it was given in the preamble to the ban. But there is reason to believe that its long postponement was not so much dictated by consideration for the heretics as by fear of the effect that their expulsion from the church might have upon the moderates of the flock. By the year 1623, however, the Reverend Jacobus Trigland had

become the most influential man in the consistory, and his unswerving orthodoxy and fanatic zeal swept all hesitation of his more opportunist colleagues aside. Trigland had been bred in the Mother Church, had studied theology at the Roman Catholic University of Louvain, and had not embraced the Reformed faith until he had grown up to manhood. The renegade could not temporize. He hated Rome because she reminded him of the errors of his youth, he hated Arminius more because his teaching implied that the converted Romanist had fallen into fresh error. To fight these modernists without mercy was, on his part, an act of self-justification. He fought them, however, with dignity and with great learning. He looks an imposing figure in the portrait engraved by W. Delff, the right hand on the Book expressive of his determination to guard it against its false interpreters, the eyes gazing straight at you as if daring you to contradict him, his flowing beard a challenge to his opponents. This was not the kind of man to fear the consequences of an action which he believed to be the only consistent and honest course to take. To his persuasive force the Consistory yielded when it expelled Reael and his fellow Arminians from the Church.

The ban acted as a trumpet call upon Vondel. It awakened him to a realization of what precious principle was at stake. Friendship for the Reaels was not the only inducement that gave him courage to turn his verse into a political weapon. He saw the principle of individual liberty in danger, and that danger was brought home to him the more forcibly when he recognized in its victims his own friends. "He who denies to Christians the Christian cup," he burst out in a satirical son-

net against "the abusers of the Church Ban," "is a tyrant in the Kingdom of Christ, for God the Father has prepared his feast for all who believe in the Son." That was spoken as a good Baptist. For the followers of Menno, believing in man's free will and in his power to execute the commandments of God, could not accept Calvin's doctrine of predestination, which Menno himself had called "a horror of horrors." Thus his Baptist bringing-up, his friendship for the Reaels, and his love of liberty combined to make him raise his voice against the ministers who were responsible for the verdict, those "executioners of conscience, and godless hirelings, who abused the shepherd's office."

The poet's entrance into the arena where the politico-religious battle was fought must have meant to him a breach with many of his own Brabant folk. For it was from among the Brabanders and Flemings that the most fanatic zealots of Calvinist orthodoxy were recruited. Professor Gomarus, Arminius' opponent at Leyden, was a refugee from the southern Netherlands, and several of the boldest preachers against the liberal—or, as the phrase then was, the libertine—magistrates of the Barneveldt faction were from those parts. "These people," said the Reverend Lydius, a moderate minister of the church, "have been the cause of Brabant and Flanders becoming lost to us, and they will play also Holland and Zeeland into the enemy's hands unless the wise magistrates prevent it in time." There was truth in that charge. Disgust at the terrorism exercised in the southern provinces by the fanatic leaders of the Calvinists had driven the waverers and the moderates into the arms of the Mother Church and back to obedience to

the power of Spain. As aliens in Holland and Zeeland, these leaders were excluded from the city governments, but they aimed at controlling them in an indirect way by means of the consistories, in which the ministers were glad to give them influence as they formed a counter-weight against the dangerous "libertines." *Nil scire tutissima fides*—not to know anything is the safest creed—was a pet phrase of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, and his agnosticisim, which preferred a humanistic to a theological reformation, was shared by a majority of the ruling class in Holland. Cornelis Pietersz Hooft was its most typical representative in Amsterdam. He was a Protestant but did not belong to any church organization, deeming the life, not the adherence to dogma, the true test of a Christian. And as a statesman he dreaded the ambitions of the divines who from the pulpit wanted to dictate to the burgomasters in the City Hall.

It may be that Vondel's dedication of his drama *Jerusalem Destroyed* to Cornelis Pietersz Hooft, in spite of its carefully neutral phrasing, must be taken as evidence that the poet, as early as 1620, had in his heart thrown in his lot with the Libertines, and that not the conviction but only the courage failed him yet to express what he felt in his poetry. There is additional ground for this assumption in the poems that refer to Oldenbarnevelt's death. For the impassioned tone of these is more easily explained as the outburst of a long suppressed indignation than as the belated wrath of a man aroused at the recollection of a crime which failed to move him at the time of its commission.

How could the death on the scaffold of the old statesman, who had served his country faithfully and gloriously

for forty years, have left the poet unmoved at the time? His fall had sent a shock not through the Republic only, but through the whole of western Europe. For, as John Ford, in *Linea Vitae: A Line of Life*, wrote of him shortly after his death, "hee was reputed to bee second to none on earth for soundnesse of designes; was indeed his countryes both mynion, mirror, and wonder." Two French ambassadors pleaded on his behalf before the States General at The Hague; King James I, who saw in the great statesman his personal enemy, had his Ambassador Sir Dudley Carleton report to him in detail the incidents of his trial; all the pamphlets relating to his case appeared in English translations; ballad-mongers hawked a rhymed legend of "Barneviles base Conspiracie" in the streets of London; and within three months of his execution the tragedy was re-enacted on the London stage. "The Players here were bringing of Barnavelt upon the stage and had bestowed a great deal of money to prepare all things for the purpose, but at th' instant were prohibited by my Lo: of London," wrote Thomas Locke, on August 14, 1619, to Sir Dudley Carleton at The Hague. A fortnight later he reported, "Our Players have found the means to goe through with the play of Barnavelt and it hath had many spectators and received applause." A tragedy that drew London crowds to its reproduction cannot have failed to stir the poet who lived so near the place of its actual occurrence.

But he waited fully five years before he, in his turn, gave dramatic form to those historical events, and it needed the suggestion of a patron to engender its conception in the poet. One day, Geeraert Brandt tells us, Vondel fell into talk about the Advocate with Mr. Albert

Koenraadts Burgh, a *Schepen* and member of the City Council. Burgh was one of the men who in the year 1618 had been chosen by Prince Maurice to replace the obnoxious supporters of Barnevelt in the city government. But he was either a clever dissimulator of his real opinions, or had, since his appointment by the Prince, changed his views as to the justice of the latter's cause. For it was he who, in the course of that conversation with the poet, suggested to him that he should make a tragic play of the Advocate's fall. "The time is not ripe yet," was Vondel's objection. Whereupon Burgh again, "Make it an allegorical play." This set the poet thinking, and taking his cue from Dr. Samuel Coster, who in 1617 had dramatized current events under the disguise of the myth of Iphigenia, he hit upon the story, told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, of Palamedes, one of the Greek commanders in the Trojan War, who, by the crafty wiles of his enemy Ulysses, was brought under suspicion of having accepted bribes from Priamus to betray his own people and stoned to death in retribution for his uncommitted crime. Even so Oldenbarnevelt had been accused of the intention to betray his country to Spain during the peace negotiations that resulted in the twelve years' truce, and it was a common rumor that he had accepted large amounts of money from foreign princes. Ulysses, in Coster's *Iphigenia*, says, alluding to Palamedes, "If I but see my chance, he'll be the victim of my worst revenge." The execution of that threat is the plot of Vondel's *Palamedes*.

Vondel was at work on his play when the news reached Amsterdam that Prince Maurice was at the point of death. A customer came into the silk shop with these



tidings, and Mayke, the poet's wife, ran to the staircase that led to his room, calling out, "Joost, the Prince is dying." "Let him die," came the answer, "I am tolling his knell." For in the play Prince Maurice was given the inglorious part of Agamemnon, who, in league with Ulysses, was instrumental in bringing the innocent Palamedes to his doom.

The drama appeared in print in the fall of 1625, and was the literary sensation of the season. For it was easy to see through the heroic disguise of the *dramatis personae*, and the less perspicacious were given a clue to the meaning of the allegory in plain allusions, scattered all through the play, to events in recent domestic history. In a long monologue which fills the entire first act Palamedes reiterates the substance of the printed *Apology* with which Oldenbarnevelt had replied to the charges of his accusers. His pleading for peace negotiations with Troy had been taken as evidence of his secretly favoring the enemy, whereas it only proved him a lover of peace, and as a lover of peace, not as traitor to his country, Oldenbarnevelt had concluded the twelve years' truce with Spain. It was a lie, says Palamedes, that he had planned to smother the two brothers, Agamemnon and Menelaus, in their own blood when, after the Greek army had landed on the Dardan shore, he ordered the fleet to put to sea, for the liars knew that this was done by order of Agamemnon himself, who, fearing lest his troops should take flight, wished to cut them off from all hope of a refuge by the dismissal of the ships. And the readers knew that the Dardan shore was the beach of Nieuwpoort in Flanders, where Prince Maurice, with troops



that fought with the courage of despair on seeing the fleet, by the Prince's order, sail away, won a glorious victory against odds over the Spaniards. It was never Palamedes' intention to curtail the power of Agamemnon and Menelaus, nor was it ever Oldenbarnevelt's to abridge that of Maurice and his brother Frederick Hendrick, who, on the contrary, had been invested with power at his insistence. Palamedes did admit that he had often crossed Calchas the seer, but was he not justified, instead of guilty, in thwarting the ambition of that crafty priest—not a Greek, by the way, but a native of Troy—who, beyond his own domain of church and altar, interfered in the counsels of the great? Had not even so Oldenbarnevelt justly opposed the political domination of the Calvinist divines, many of whom,—and those the most fanatical—were not even Hollanders born? And all this calumny was the reward for what he, Palamedes, had done in the service of his country; he had sheltered foreign refugees and thereby increased the country's population and the size of its cities; he had won crowned neighbors for its allies; he had hauled in, with many a keel, the harvest that the Orient reaped; yea, he had sought a free passage through the arctic north! Who could mistake in these achievements of the Greek Palamedes the part that Oldenbarnevelt had taken in harboring alien victims of persecution—Portuguese Jews, Huguenots, Walloons, Brabanders, Flemings, and English separatists—in obtaining support for the Republic from King Henry IV of France and Queen Elizabeth, in founding the Dutch East India Company, in stimulating the heroic search for the northeast passage

to China and the Indies? And the Palamedes who boasted of these exploits died uttering the words that were the Advocate's farewell to his people:

Countrymen, let your kindness ne'er believe  
The treason, calumny's fictitious charge.  
That is my heart's one wish. I've acted aye  
Piously, honestly, and openly,  
And die an upright Greek as I have lived.

The English poets of *The Tragedy of Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt* were less partial to their hero than was Vondel to his Dutch Palamedes. They did not acquit him, for they probably went by the same misleading evidence that the minstrel of the street ballad knew; besides, the extreme severity of his sentence made it impossible for them not to believe in his guilt. But the greater is their merit in that they did not allow the sin of pride, of which they thought him possessed, to blind them to his moral greatness. But the Dutch poet, in his passionate worship of the Advocate, saw the root of all his suffering in the envy and hatred of his enemies. Hence Palamedes falls a victim to passions too base and too brutal for so noble a prey, so that his death, while arousing our horror, leaves us tearless. For we cannot feel moved to pity by a hero's fate who is too saintlike a figure to touch our heart with sympathy. Palamedes' only fault is that he has no fault, but that one fault robs him of his only right to exist as a tragic hero. Albert Verwey, a living Dutch poet, who wrote a drama on the same theme, saw in the conflict between Prince Maurice and the Advocate the unavoidable, relentless course of fate, which does not give life to the

new without the destruction of the old. He made the old statesman, in the night before his execution, speak thus to the two divines who visit him in his cell:

Ye ask how't is that I, now old and cold,  
 Land where I never was before, the avenging  
 Tribunal? First I deemed my fate was owing  
 To the Prince's malice and my own sad folly,  
 My pride, my luckless star; but now, this night,  
 My last, I see the truth, 't is not I die,  
 The Time, my Time, Prince William's time, the world  
 Of yesterday is tottering, and my head,  
 Being head of that world, falls first. Think it not  
                   strange  
 That one rule yields to another. 'Tis Life's lesson,  
 'Tis History's demonstration, 'tis my fate.  
 I did the right, but the right of my time. Now 'tis  
 No longer right, but deemed the opposite.

This was the view of the historical Oldenbarnevelt himself. Sir Dudley Carleton recounts that the Advocate, in conversation with the Reverend Walaeus of Middelburg concerning the points on which his death sentence was based, said to that worthy: "I governed when I was in authority according to the maxims of that time; and now I am condemned to die according to the maxims of this."

Vondel was not aware that any maxims of state were involved in the conflict. In his conception it was the malice of his enemies,—chief among whom was the diplomat François van Aerssen, the Ulysses of the allegory,—that brought about Oldenbarnevelt's fall. That malice, as he saw it, was whetted by lust of power and lust of graft, which could not be gratified while the Advocate kept faithful watch over the Republic:

They mean to strike the commonwealth in me,  
They call the Greece I freed to slavish service,  
And stealthily pluck the flight pens from her wings.  
They would strike justice dumb in striking me  
And with religion mask their base intent.  
By bankrupt sycophants of Agamemnon  
We are ruled, who do not aim at statesmanship  
But only seek themselves. The hue and cry is  
Not for the Saint, but for the Saint his see.

This was bold language, as the men who were thus, by one sweeping charge, branded as grafters, and as sycophants of the late Prince of Orange, were the victors in the late conflict and the momentary rulers at The Hague. The satire against the Calvinist ministers, personified in Calchas and Eurypilus, was no less bitter and direct: Agamemnon, in order to entrap his enemy,

Exploits the ancient hatred of the priests,  
Ministers of predestinated doom;  
Those make him drip with sweat amid the press  
Of slanderers and, lying what they list,  
Count wickedness no crime that serves the gods.

Thus the poet fearlessly attacked both the preachers and the politicians of the party in power, neither of whom he could expect to bend meekly under the lashes of his whip. Nor were they slow in striking back. The sale of the book was forbidden, the copies in stock at the Amsterdam bookshops were confiscated, and the Fiscal, or Attorney General, at The Hague demanded from the authorities in Amsterdam the poet's surrender to the jurisdiction of the Court of Holland.

Vondel was a citizen of Amsterdam, and the city's right and honor were involved in the reply to this peremptory demand. The Pensionary of Amsterdam, at that time, was Adriaan Pauw, whose father had been

one of the Advocate's judges and the leader, in Amsterdam, of the anti-Barneveldt faction. Pauw was in favor of Vondel's extradition, but one of the *Schepens*, Andries Bicker, voiced the feeling of the majority and the city's proud sense of independence when he asked: "What becomes of our authority if we allow our citizens to be taken to The Hague?" The city's charter forbade that a citizen should be tried in the first instance before a court outside the jurisdiction of Amsterdam, and Vondel's case was, accordingly, referred to the bench of *Schepens* in his own city. The defendant appeared before his judges with two attorneys and a solicitor, being evidently aware that his freedom, if not his life, was at stake. The solicitor's conclusion was "that the tragedy should be taken as a Greek story, and that the poet had adorned and enlivened the subject by adding extraneous and decorative matter, according to poetic license and the laws of the stage; that its contents should be understood not according to what some one or other, like a venom-sucking spider, or as it were with pincers, extracted from it, but according to the poet's own explanation, as every man is an interpreter of his own words." The oldest of the *Schepens* happened to be the same Albert Koenraadts Burgh who had first suggested to Vondel the composition of an allegorical play on the Advocate's fall; from him the poet need fear no scathing indictment of his satire. "It was a poet's work," was his opinion, "and it was easy to give the tragedy a different meaning." The *Schout*, Jan ten Grootenhuis, who acted as public prosecutor, showed great leniency and charged the accused with no greater crime than "that he had said certain things in his tragedy

that he should have suppressed." He was sentenced, by a majority vote, to the payment of a fine of three hundred florins (\$120), a punishment which his enemies scornfully called a scourging with fox-tails.

The prosecution of the poet made him from a local into a national celebrity. His forbidden book became, thanks to that ban, the best seller of the year. The first edition, as far as it had not been confiscated, was out of print within a fortnight, a few weeks later a second saw the light, soon to be followed by a third, and before a year had passed the book had reached a seventh edition. The effect upon Vondel of this sudden rise to fame was twofold. It made him realize what power he possessed to mould the opinion of his fellow citizens, and having learnt his power he found in himself the courage to use it henceforth in the service of what he believed to be the truth. For his deeply religious nature accepted the gift of God revealed to him as a talent that had to yield its interest to the Giver, and the greater the gift the greater the trust and the duty it imposed. To be silent where his voice should chastise evil, to suppress the truth because to speak it might be dangerous, would have lowered himself, in his own eyes, to the level of the wicked and slothful servant. He became a fighting poet because he knew that in his poetry he wielded a divine weapon. In spite of his experience with *Palamedes*, he reverted again and again to the martyrdom of Oldenbarnevelt, in a flaming ode on the anniversary of his death, in lines on the cane that had supported him on his way to the scaffold, in an echo-verse that makes the church where he lies buried reply to the questions of a stranger, in a sarcastic sum-



mons to prayer addressed to the conscience-stricken judges of the Advocate. His nearest relatives scolded him for his quarrelsome mood, which only brought him into trouble. He knew and envied the peace of those who could restrain the inward urge to speak out:

For Truth—that's old—finds nowhere open home.  
They're counted wise who fingers lay on lips.  
If I but knew that trick. But the inmost thought  
Wells to the throat with pressure unrestrained,  
And acts as new-made wine that bursts the cask.

He could not, and he would not, be silent. His gift was the giver's to be used by its recipient in the service of Him who is the Truth.

There was, perhaps, an element of self-delusion in this belief. His righteous indignation found it, indeed, difficult not to write satire, but on the other hand, to write satire was easy to his hatred. Vondel was too personal in his diatribes to escape the suspicion of satisfying the dictates of his own mood no less than those of Virtue and Public Morality. He would, no doubt, have denied the charge, and have claimed that the men he attacked were attacked not as objects of the poet's hatred but as embodiments of the evil that he satirized. Vice in the abstract is less apt to fan the fire of wrath than vice exemplified in the vicious, and if his satire grew fiercer where it aimed not at evil but at the evildoers, it was only because in them he visualized it so much more clearly and loathed it the more bitterly in proportion. But this very tendency to identify the agents with the system that they served made him unjust towards his victims. For he could not realize that honest men might be honestly engaged in a daily task which, in his eyes,



was part of a wicked scheme. To Vondel the orthodox Church of the Calvinists was a stronghold of wicked intolerance, and any minister in that church was, therefore, guilty, in his judgment, as an abettor of such wickedness, and deserved to be made a target of his venomous arrows. "Whenever I can attack those people," he said, "I feel the spirit move me." And once moved by the spirit, he was a perverse agent of justice, not as she blind in respect of persons, but blinded by passion to any good that there might be in the accused.

It is, however, not abstract justice, but an honest belief in the justice of his cause that the poet needs for his inspiration. Those very satires in which Vondel unjustly attacked reputations belong, if considered as poetry, to his best satirical verse, since the passion that stirred in him at the thought of his antagonists gave zest to the satire. One of his most delightful pieces is a popular ballad deriding the Amsterdam consistory for expelling from its midst a minister who had dared to criticize its actions. The culprit was called Hanecop, which means "cock's head," and taking his cue from his hero's name, the poet represented the quarrel in the consistory as a cock-fight in a poultry yard. It was written in the Amsterdam dialect, and its fitness for recitation among the vulgar was further emphasized by the title *Rommelpot of the Poultry Yard*. For a *rommelpot* is a primitive musical instrument, consisting of a jar with a pig's bladder tightly stretched over it. A small hole is pricked in the centre of the bladder, and the musician who performs on this perforated drum produces a rumbling music by moving the stick up and down through the

narrow opening. Hence the name *rommelpot* or rumblepot. Vondel introduces himself as the *rommelpot* player and the bookseller and publisher Marten Jansz Brandt, who was the faithful printer of the ministers' theological works, as singing the ballad in his creaky voice to the accompaniment of Vondel's ghastly music.

This mock-heroic ballad is a precious document of Amsterdam history. It presents a colorful picture, in Jan Steen's best manner, of life seen as a medley of folly and pride and pretense. Hanecop had been a minister of the church at Breda, and when this town had surrendered to the Spaniards, he had accepted a call to Amsterdam:

All the roosters crowed a welcome  
To the brother from Breda.  
'Twas all sweetness that one saw.  
But alas, it is but seldom  
That the sweet does not turn sour.  
Always may but last an hour.

For Hanecop was soon found out to be tainted with a moderation that smacked of Arminianism. He might be sound in his teaching of the true doctrine, but he did not approve of the expulsion of Jacob Laurensz Reael and his fellow heretics, and—which was worse—he said so openly, and criticized from the pulpit some of his colleagues for their insolent speeches against the city's burgomasters. At Easter, 1626, an incident occurred that brought the quarrel between the Reverend Hanecop and his brethren to a head. The Amsterdam authorities were intentionally slack in enforcing the prohibition of Arminian conventicles. Repeated protests of the consistory were ignored by the burgomasters. The Rever-

end Smout, the most violent among the fifteen ministers in Amsterdam, finally appealed to the mob for aid against the inactive magistrates. In a sermon on Easter Monday, April 13, he said to his audience, "If the governors do not perform their duty any better in eradicating heresies to the spreading of God's and Christ's praise, the children, yea the cobbles of the street, shall serve the Lord!" The children and the poor in spirit took the hint. A mob of gutter-snipes, street Arabs, and hooligans bombarded that same day the Arminian meeting-house near the Montelbaan Tower, broke up the meeting, and pillaged the house. A major of the civic guard, with a body of soldiers, was sent to restore order. When the mob disregarded his command to disperse, he let his men fire, and two of the rioters were killed. The next day, however, the disturbance began afresh. What the wreckers had left standing of the house they now leveled to the ground, and the trophies of their pillage were carried in triumph through the city and past the City Hall in bold defiance of the burgomasters. The day after, three of the ringleaders were caught. But the Reverend Smout, who had taught them to use cobbles for arguments, did not leave them in the lurch. Accompanied by his colleague Cloppenburgh and two elders, he appeared before the Burgomasters to warn them that, "if De Roo—one of the rioters—should receive the death penalty, no prayers would be said for him in church, no minister would assist him on the scaffold, let alone admonish him to prepare himself for death, since he had been zealous in a good cause." And on the Sunday after, he referred in his sermon to the mob as "instru-

ments used and propelled by God to this highly necessary work, the destruction of heresy."

Hanecop alone rebuked the rioters from the pulpit and admonished the people to observe obedience to the authorities. He flatly contradicted his colleagues who maintained that the Arminians had themselves provoked the disturbance. His testimony had force, as he lived next-door to the pillaged meeting-house and had watched the outrage with his own eyes.

His adherence to the truth was, in the eyes of his colleagues, foul treason to the consistory, and an investigation was begun to ascertain the traitor's orthodoxy. This brought to light sufficient evidence to justify his exclusion from Holy Communion. For had he not said, in reply to Jacobus Trigland's remark that the Arminians had no belief, "I dare say that those who proclaim so much are heretics?" He was further refused the attestation which he needed to be readmitted to the ministry elsewhere, and although the consistory's cruel verdict was reversed by the synod, this moral rehabilitation could not restore to Hanecop his former health. Physically and mentally he was, as a result of the long persecution, a broken man.

Vondel's sense of justice was outraged by the affair. The burlesque version that he gave of it has flashes of grim sarcasm leaping up from the fire that smouldered under the surface of his humor:

All the roosters were a-cackle,  
    Calling "murderer" the one  
    Who with rapier and with gun  
Dared the crowd of Christ to tackle,  
    And, to grieve each tender cock,  
    Massacred their guileless flock,

Yea, they crowed, across our lattice  
Thousands daily push their head,  
Greedy for the corn we shed.  
Therefore, if our foes besat us,  
They would face the godly mob  
That supports us for the cob.

The rabble from the slums lived on the doles of the parish, and the consistory which controlled the relief work used the almsgiving as a lever of mob violence. Were the burgomasters recalcitrant? The ministers would teach them obedience to the consistory by rousing the parish paupers to action. Smout had even the effrontery to say that "such slack rulers should be shipped across the Y to the gallows and taught to look at the stars through a hempen loop." Vondel, who saw in the authorities the upholders of the freedom of conscience for which his parents had fled to the city, repaid such virulence with the same coin. And remembering the intolerance of the Catholic clergy in the days of the Spanish inquisition, he turned, at the close of his ballad, to the statue of St. Peter which, as a left-over of pre-Reformation days, still watched with his rooster and his keys over the entrance gate to the city hospital, and addressed to the saint this question, which stung the Calvinist divines by the implied comparison:

In conclusion, Spittle Peter,  
If I asked your ancient bird,  
Since this foolish farce occurred,  
'Do these fowl behave much neater  
Than the stock of years ago?'  
Won't he crow, O no! O no!

The sting was deserved. For these ministers of the Word were no less self-righteous and impatient of con-

tradiction than were the inquisitors of Alva's régime. Jacobus Trigland, who was a moderate man in comparison to Smout and Cloppenburgh, lumped "pagan, popish, Socinian, Mennonite, and Arminian errors" together as all unchristian and hostile to the true religion. As under Spain the Roman Catholic Church suffered no heterodoxy, even so in the Dutch Republic the Church of Calvin dictated that "there may be only one religion in the State; all heretics must be driven out; for better is a desolate city than a trafficking city full of sectarians."

This church theory was irreconcilable with the practice of the Amsterdam magistrates, whose aim was not the victory of one religion but the growth and prosperity of their city. A creed that would dominate at the cost of the city's commerce could not win favor with the burgomasters, and the fiercer the ministers grew in their intolerance, the less inclined appeared the city rulers to humor them. The consistory's persecution of Brother Hanecop brought it only a Pyrrhic victory. For it was followed by a weakening of their influence in the city council, as the middle party, composed of moderate Calvinists who until then had sided with the consistory, veered round to the position of the Libertines to help them safeguard the city's material welfare. The Arminians began to hold their meetings openly, and soon obtained permission to build a church of their own. Prominent men no longer feared to show their sympathy with the Arminian teachings. Vondel's friend Daniel Mostaert, the secretary of the city, attended their services, to the vexation of the consistory, which decided for that reason "to keep an eye on him." In the fall of 1628, a well-known favorer of the Arminians, Jan Klaasz



Vlooswyk, was elected captain of the civic guard. Several members of the guard, backed by the ministers, refused to swear to him the prescribed oath of obedience. The Reverend Cloppenburgh consulted the theological faculty of Leyden as to the justice of the magistrates of Amsterdam in demanding an oath to a sworn enemy of the true religion and in dismissing those who refused it from the guard. The Leyden faculty, a stronghold of orthodox Calvinism, gave the answer that Cloppenburgh needed. Thus the theological controversy even invaded the military forces of the city, causing unrest and disturbance of the peace. The burgomasters could not suffer such interference and took vigorous action against Cloppenburgh and the elders who had been his accomplices in this matter. The consistory disavowed any intention on its part to conspire against the magistracy. Cloppenburgh fled the city, the two elders were banished from its territory as disturbers of the city's peace, and the city government decided that in the future all meetings of the consistory should be attended by two of its delegates as a safeguard against any renewal of consistorial agitation against the civil authorities.

A year later Smout followed his colleague into exile. His departure was the final blow to rampant theocracy in Amsterdam. Of all the divines whom Vondel persecuted with his satire Smout was the one that he hated most. For Smout was the most intransigent among the brethren and the boldest critic of the authorities. When, in 1626, political reasons induced the States General to lend armed support to the Catholic King of France against the Huguenots of La Rochelle, Smout had the temerity to say in the pulpit, "The cause of the coun-



try's sufferings is that people are pushed into the Government who are advocates of Popery. The examples and the fruits thereof are daily seen in the States, which have sent their ships before Rochelle to suppress the Reformed Religion and assist the child of perdition, the child of the devils, the dragon, the first shoot from which the Anti-Christ has grown, where the whore of Babylon sits on the beast with seven heads. And in order that you may know of whom I am speaking: I mean the King of France, Louis XIII, son of Henry IV the Apostate." Alluding to that sermon Vondel made Rooster Fathead—his nickname for Smout—cry out in the ballad of the fighting cocks:

If I dared decrow a kingly  
Cock, who, in his royal home,  
With a crownlet on his comb,  
Sits emperched atop and singly,  
Would then Coppen, do you think,  
Make me silent at his blink?

Coppen—Hanecop's name in the ballad—did not silence him, indeed, but the burgomasters did in 1630. He was summoned to appear before them, and he came, not as a penitent, but sure of himself as a prophet of the divine wrath. "Gentlemen," he said, "kneel before God at the eleventh hour; desist from the procedure you have entered upon; for otherwise you will lead yourselves and your children into perdition." But this bravado could not save him. He had to leave the scene of his zealous activity, proudly conscious of the righteousness of his cause and willing to suffer martyrdom in its service.

It is not likely that upon parting he gave a moment's thought to the poet whose satirical verse had given zest

to the enmity of his opponents. To Smout and Trigland and their colleagues, all learned divines and writers of voluminous books on theology, Vondel was one of a despicable crew of ballad-mongers, whom it was beneath their dignity to notice. In a meeting of the consistory a general complaint was made about *Rommelpots* and broadsides in which that august body was libeled, but the ministers took the wise and dignified course of ignoring them in public. Posterity, however, has a different estimate of the relative values of the preachers and the poet. If Trigland and Smout and Cloppenburgh are still familiar names, they owe their notoriety not to the bulky volumes which they published but to the satirist whom they ignored. The wounds that he struck them did not kill the living, yet only by the scars which they left do we know the dead.

In Vondel's own opinion the *Rommelpot* was, doubtless, little better than a playful skit, from which he expected no increase to his fame as a poet. In it, as in other songs of this period that ridiculed the ministers and their partisans, he stooped to the low speech of the parish-fed mob, the "Godly rabble." They were lampoons, which he enjoyed writing for the pain that they inflicted; they were not satires such as he took pride in writing for the fame that they brought him. One had to follow in the steps of Juvenal and Horace to be worthy the name of satirist, discard the ballad metre for the dignified flow of the alexandrine, and scourge follies and failures instead of the fools. Vondel vindicated the freedom of thought against the theocrats in a poem of this nobler and more ambitious style. *Harpoon* is its title. In it he has drawn the portrait of the good preacher Godfrey

Whose word was like unto a blessed seed.  
 He was the salt of souls. He meddled not  
 With secular power. A beacon was his life.  
 All Scripture's lore stood written in his heart.  
 His pious soul was virtue's sacred shrine.  
 What threshold he had crossed bore Christ's  
     own mark.

His lips spoke comfort to the sick in pain,  
 His wisdom soothed the angry in their wrath.  
 Ribaldry ceased when he the pulpit took,  
 Justice increased, and pleaders quenched  
     their fire.

Taverns stood empty, not a knife was drawn.  
 The man's sincerity outrang the bells.  
 Content with little, loved by poor and rich,  
 He served them both, they being alike to him.  
 One saw him seldom at the rich man's board.  
 He shunned not mirth, but shunned to give  
     offence.

While he was spared the people loved their  
     God,

And gave obedience to their sovereign lord.

But this counterpart to Chaucer's portrait of "a poure persoun of a toun" did no longer resemble the type of minister that Vondel knew in Amsterdam. He contrasts it with another character sketch of the Reverend Wolfard, under whose ministry the people demoralized, rebelled against their over-lords, quarreled among themselves, and blurred God's image in their hearts, each denying the other salvation for the sake of a dogmatic trifle. The ministers of Wolfard's type were Pharisees without a spark of Christian love:

What hypocrites there are in lamb's disguise!

But that they're wolves bursts out when as  
     they howl

And whine about their cross and grievous  
     pain,

Having been curbed that others may have  
     peace.

The magistrates who held these zealots in check were the shepherds of their own preachers. Vondel mentioned one of these rulers by name, "an upright nobleman, a noble, too, in soul." But the Lord of Schagen had his own conception of true nobility and thanked the poet but little for his praise. For he let it be known that "he regretted being proclaimed to all the world as a person who took a pleasure in priding himself on having disciplined his preacher." That was a sentiment which Vondel could neither share nor appreciate, for his artistic temperament took a passionate pleasure in both denunciation and praise. If there was merit in subduing a firebrand, there was merit in extolling the subduer. One had only to look at the difference between Leyden and Amsterdam. In Leyden: a magistrate subservient to the will of a preaching demagogue—a renegade monk, by the way—and liberty an exile from the city; in Amsterdam, since Smout and Cloppenburgh were banished:

Liberty has free sway and with full sails  
Flies in and out. Thus is the city built.  
The merchant delveth elbow-deep in gold.  
No popish firebrand here controls the gate.

And Leyden, oblivious of her own heroism in the days of the Spanish siege, when she minted emergency paper coins bearing the legend *Haec Libertatis Ergo*—This for freedom's sake—had now become the exclusive stronghold of Walloon and Flemish Calvinists, who with their intolerance provoked the natives of the city that once had sheltered them in their need. Thus in a brilliant satire to which he gave the legend from the coin as a title, Vondel invited his reader to look upon this picture

and on this. It was better to live in free Amsterdam, under a magistrate who let the citizens work out their own salvation, believing that God Himself shall sound each individual conscience.

The repeated allusions to the Calvinist zealots from Brabant and Flanders as the chief disturbers of the peace imply Vondel's complete dissociation from his former compatriots. He had, by this time, become an Amsterdammer through and through, had discarded his Brabantisms for the language of Holland, and mastered the speech of the vulgar so completely as to sing to them ballads in their own idiom. He felt himself of the city, and the city to be his for better and for worse. This feeling gave him the right to criticize the rulers, and make his satire serve the welfare of Amsterdam and Holland. For his admiration of the city and the Republic did not blind him to the corruption and the graft among their rulers that were undermining their strength. The war with Spain was being waged with inefficiency and slackness. The tax-payer, that poor, overburdened donkey, nearly succumbed under his growing load, but to what use was turned the money that he carried to the treasury? Where were the new men-of-war that should have been launched? Where the crews that were supposed to have been enlisted? And meanwhile the Dunkirk pirates in the service of Spain captured Dutch ships, murdered Dutch sailors, and paralyzed the commerce of the country. Where was the fault? In the show and foolish pomp of the rich:

Extravagance is deaf to reason's plea,  
And curbs good people's rights, sells offices,  
And trades with Spain, though death the penalty,

Connives at smuggling and evades the excise,  
And robs the land of ships, of wares, of freights,  
Takes gifts for bribes, and lets the bag go lost,  
And, at the accounting, bag and book are gone.  
It may be human that such things occur,  
But often there's a reason: bad arrears  
Change into riches. That's, in short, our plague:  
The call is 'Drive the donkey! carry, beast!  
The land needs flour, so take the sack to mill.  
Our job's to drive, and thine to bear the load.  
Be thankful that thou hast in part won free,  
If not in body, free, at least, in soul.'

*Roskam*, that is Curry Comb, was the title of the satire from which these verses are quoted. The poet did not, indeed, handle it to curry favor with the men in power. He used it to cleanse the State of favoritism and corruption, and his indictment, couched in general terms, of the entire ruling class was an act of courage which only those who had a clear conscience could appreciate. Only two men were mentioned by name, and those he mentioned to praise them. But they were no longer among the living, and their memory was called up to shame the rulers of the present with those shining examples of the past. One was the late Burgomaster Hooft, the poet's father, "a furrowed brow, a conscience without wrinkle," the Dutch Cato of a former generation, in memory of whom Vondel dedicated his satire to the son.

But this praise of the past was not the expression of a pessimism that, disillusioned by life's experience, found a cold comfort in looking backward. Vondel's contemporaries knew what occasion had prompted his sweeping satire. In 1625 and 1626 a sensational trial of six members of the Admiralty of Rotterdam had revealed an

amazing story of sordid and shameless corruption. The Amsterdam poet alludes in the lines already quoted to the various crimes of which the accused were found guilty, and his satire, though a sweeping lament over the general decline of public morality, must have pleased his fellow citizens by the complacent implication that Amsterdam had a better government than her rival on the river Maas.



## V.

### THE CITY'S PAST

When Vondel wrote his *Roskam*, in the late 'twenties, he had passed the midway of mortal life. But his poetical career was still in its ascent. The growth of his artistic power was slower than his physical growth. The satirist who played the *Rommelpot* in derision of ministers of the church was still sowing the poet's wild oats. The man in his prime had, as an artist, not yet come of age. The satirist's mood was not Vondel's by nature; it was, in his case, a distemper of poetic youth to be thrown off when the boy would mature to manhood. The born satirist suffers from a chronic atrophy of the heart, which makes him incapable of that charitable sympathy that recognizes in the sinner a fellow-stumbler only weaker than oneself. But Vondel possessed the intuitive understanding for all that is human, and his satire was only the playfulness of a generous soul still in the years of indiscretion.

When the man had passed his fortieth year, the poet began to realize that playtime was over. The title of *Head of Holland's Poets*, with which he had greeted Hooft in *Roskam*, had, by common consent, become his own, and he felt that he must live up to his new-won fame by something nobler than satire. Virgil was a greater poet than Juvenal, and Tasso, in modern times, had sur-

passed all his Italian rivals. To write the great epic of Dutch literature became Vondel's ambition. Like Milton he was long casting about for a hero, having fixed upon an epic before he knew whom he would sing, and he shared Milton's desire to give account to his friends of "what the mind, at home in the spacious circuits of her musing, hath liberty to propose to herself." He thought of Reael, but his very friendship for the man which prompted the choice made the project impossible of execution. He did not stand removed from him at sufficient distance to view him, amid the modern scene of his life's career, as the dominating figure of that scene. His personal friendship may have fondly imagined that he was of that great stature, but his poetic vision did not see it so. King Henry IV of France was a fitter theme. His death by an assassin's hand would yield an effective conclusion to a story astir with deeds of prowess and great historical events. Hooft had written a *Life of Henry the Great* in a prose style modeled on that of Tacitus. That book contained all the material that Vondel needed for his epic. But the seeming easiness of the task may have lessened his ardor: he would not be a mere versifier of the historian's prose. His choice was finally fixed upon Constantine the Great. "My opinion is," wrote Grotius in a letter of August 17, 1632, "that you have thought of a fitting subject for a perfect poem, as the march of Constantine upon Rome has entailed great consequences in the affairs of the world. The Greeks praise Constantine very highly and call him equal to the Apostles. In my opinion he has not been a bad Prince since he embraced Christendom. But whereas the Christians extol him to the sky, Zosimus, a blind

zealot for the Pagan faith, has justly or unjustly brought together all possible stories that could detract from his greatness. But you say wisely that it is the poet's right to overlook or disbelieve the faults of those whom they choose as subjects of their praise and an example of virtue."

Grotius, in the letter from which these words are quoted, addressed the poet as his "Very learned, excellent friend." Their friendship was of recent date. The great jurist had been living in exile since, in a chest that was supposed to contain his books, he had escaped from the castle of Loevesteyn, where the same judges that condemned Oldenbarnevelt to death had confined him to lifelong imprisonment. But under the Stadtholdership of Prince Frederick Hendrick, who had succeeded his brother Maurice in 1625, the animosity against the Barnevelt party had gradually subsided; in 1630 his confiscated possessions were restored to him; and in the autumn of the following year, he unexpectedly appeared in Rotterdam, confident that no objections would be raised against his unpermitted return. But only on condition that he should beg to be pardoned was he allowed to stay on, and this he refused to do as it would imply a confession of guilt. So on April 17, 1632, Grotius said again farewell to his native land, and went to Hamburg.

"We hate the Light that is adored by others," wrote Vondel bitterly. He realized the greatness of the loss that the country inflicted on itself, for he could measure it by the gain which he had made in those first months of a friendship that was to unite the two for life. The poet who had no university education, who had not even attended a Latin grammar school, felt humbly proud

of his intimacy with the greatest scholar of the age. The men of learning, the possessors of Latin and Greek, formed in those days a caste which was intolerant towards intruding laymen. Vondel's reception within the circle of Grotius' acquaintance was the accolade that dubbed him knight in the international order of classical learning. Brandt, his biographer, tells of a dinner party at the house of Mr. Joost Brasser, a brother of the country's Lord Treasurer, to which Vondel was invited in the company of Grotius, Vossius, and Barlaeus. Vondel was silent at the meal, absorbed in his own thoughts, if we must believe Brandt; no doubt the one absorbing thought that stilled his speech was the sense of his own littleness by the side of those giants of knowledge, the jurist-theologian, the philologist, and the historian, from whom and whose like the little he knew was all derived. But love of poetry made the scholars and their admiring pupil equals. The theorist Vossius, the Latin poets Grotius and Barlaeus, knew Vondel's worth and repaid his homage to their learning in praise and admiration of his genius. On January 8, 1632, the city of Amsterdam opened its *Athenaeum Illustre*, the rival institution of Leyden's university, on which occasion we find the four men again united by their common interest. Grotius was present at the ceremony, Barlaeus and Vossius were the shining lights of the small faculty, the latter gave the inaugural address, and Vondel celebrated the event in an Horatian ode. Relying on the encouragement and the scholarship of these learned friends, Vondel felt confident that his ambition to write the great epic of Dutch literature was not beyond his poetic powers.

The great Emperor was the daily companion of his

thoughts for many years, and became so dear to him by that intimacy that he made him the godfather of the little boy who was born while the poem was in progress. But little Constantine was not given a younger brother in Constantine the Great, and his own life was but an ephemeral one, like a bird's flight from space into space across a room, in at one window and out at the other. "Eternity transcends the moment," runs the closing line of the melodious elegy with which Vondel consoled himself over his loss. His epic was to help him to overcome his grief, and to win him eternity as the reward for his laborious moments.

But the great Constantine was never reborn in Vondel's poem. In a letter to Grotius, of 1639, he pleaded despondency as the cause of his failure. In 1633 he had buried another child, little eight-year old Sara, and two years later he had carried the mother to her last rest in St. Nicholas' Church. "My courage received a blow," he wrote Grotius, "by the death of my late wife, so that I must forget my great Constantine and be content with lesser matter." The spirit of his departed Mary must have haunted him in the night after he wrote these words of resignation. For shortly after her death, Vondel had, like Milton, beheld "his late espoused saint brought to him like Alcestis from the grave," beseeching him not to mourn and to complete his great epic. Had the prayer of the dead one, to which the wish of his own heart must have responded, been silenced by the memory of her in the flesh? Had she, alive, been an inspiration which, now that her presence was lost, could not be rekindled, not even by the memory of that last appeal from beyond the grave?

It is a human weakness to blame our softer feelings for our failures. It is less humiliating to our pride if defeat is caused by the potency of grief than to admit our own impotence. Vondel found out that he had set himself a task which he could not accomplish. He had acquired the technical skill by making a prose translation of Tasso's great epic, he had the assistance of great scholars in the collecting of his historical material, he had the scholarly intuition to digest and to fashion it for his own purpose. All the while, however, he must have felt that his heart was not in it, which alone could send the thrill of beauty through his verse. The heart's apathy resulted not from the strain of excessive sorrow. It was not the memory of his dead wife that dammed the stream of his epic, it was the poet's incapacity to see the dead Constantine as a living hero which left the heart indifferent. He never completed his epic because it was and remained a self-imposed task, not a work that he could not help doing because love craved for utterance, but a performance which his reason told him it would be wise and honorable to undertake. The story of Constantine left his heart cold as stone, and although his will was a powerful taskmaster, the master's rod could not strike living water from the rock.

Vondel's fancy was not yet capable of resuscitating and vivifying the past unless he could see it in relation to his own Amsterdam, or as a reflection of the present. When he thought of Rome, he beheld in its mirror the great city to which he himself belonged. Its consuls are burgomasters in Vondel's vocabulary, and the *patres conscripti* a city council. Amsterdam was an ever inspiring source of his poetry, and the verse in its praise



rose up from his heart in hymns of sheer beauty. No building of public importance was raised upon its watery ground but Vondel sang its magnificence and the munificence of the magistrate. We saw him honor the new *Athenaeum Illustre* with an ode; in 1638 the first theatre of Amsterdam was opened with a drama that Vondel had written for the occasion; a new city hall was inaugurated in 1655, and Vondel celebrated the event with a great poem; in 1657 the completion of the naval arsenal again called for an outburst of song. He was an Amsterdam Amphion singing the city of his praise out of the ground. Not for the blow which his courage had received by the death of his late wife, but for the love of Amsterdam must he forget his great Constantine, and though he called it "lesser matter" with which he had "to be content," he can hardly have meant, nor can Grotius have taken, those words in full earnest. He knew, and Grotius knew, that he had written a work on which he could safely rest his hope on surviving himself, a work which his friend and correspondent called immortal. It was the drama with which the first theatre of Amsterdam was opened on January 3, 1638, and its title was *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*.

The erection of this theatre was the indirect result of the fusion in 1632 between Dr. Samuel Coster's Dutch Academy and the Chamber of Rhetoric, the Eglantine. The old quarrels were forgotten and a common love of the stage reunited the members of the two rival institutions. Two years earlier, the Brabant Chamber, the Lavender, had been incorporated with the Academy, so that the latter had become the sole purveyor of dramatic entertainment in Amsterdam. The old building



on the *Keizersgracht*, the Emperor's Canal, could no longer hold the crowds that came to enjoy themselves. Adjoining lots were purchased, the houses that occupied them, together with the Academy, were razed to the ground, and at the close of the year 1637 the new theatre, the *Schouwburg* so-called, was ready for its opening performance.

The plot of Vondel's play was an episode from the early history of Amsterdam, the siege and sack of the castle of Aemstel in revenge of the murder of Floris V, Count of Holland. For Gijsbrecht, the Lord of Aemstel, had been one of the noblemen involved in the conspiracy against the count, whose popularity with the common people—a thorn in the flesh of the nobility—had earned him the nickname of God of the Churls. Gijsbrecht's seat, near the confluence of the Aemstel and the Y, was destroyed by his enemies, and he himself forced to go into exile.

As the opening of the new *Schouwburg* was to occur at Christmas, 1637, the poet let the action take place on the day of Our Lord's nativity. At the beginning of the play the siege has lasted a full year. But unexpectedly, on Christmas morning, the enemies are reported to be in retreat. Those of Amsterdam go in pursuit of them, but they bring only one captive back into the town. This man, who gives his name as Vosmeer, tells a pitiful story of how he was dealt with by his own people, and Gijsbrecht, deceived by his glib talk, takes him in as a welcome deserter from the hostile camp. At Vosmeer's advice they haul in a ship full of firewood which the enemy, in his precipitate departure, has abandoned just outside the wall. But hidden under

the cargo of fuel lie the enemy's men that will surprise the town. At midnight, while all the people are attending mass to thank the Lord for their delivery, Vosmeer and his hidden crew set the town on fire and let in the besiegers, who under cover of the darkness have returned to their entrenchments. There is no hope of saving the town. Gijsbrecht, nevertheless, is determined to hold the castle. But while he is trying to persuade his wife, Badeloch, to escape with the children and the fugitives across the water, the angel Raphael descends from heaven and commands him to leave the castle to its fate. He is to go to Prussia and found there a town which he must name New-Holland. And to console him over his defeat, the angel predicts the re-birth of Amsterdam and her rise to such glory as Gijsbrecht in his proudest dreams could not have foreseen, a prophecy of the city's greatness in Vondel's own lifetime.

Even this brief outline of the plot will reveal its similarity to the story of Troy. Gijsbrecht is an Amsterdam Aeneas, Vosmeer the spy acts the part of treacherous Sinon, the ship with its cargo of osier, called the *Zeepaert*, the Sea Horse, recalls by its name and its function the wooden horse of Troy, the river Amstel is a Dutch Xanthus, and each of the minor characters has his counterpart in the heroic legend. The play, although based on historical fact, is a very skilful dramatization of the second book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, just as *Palamedes*, a satire on events of national history, was a dramatization of Ovid. But the differences between the two plays are more significant than the traits they have in common. In the earlier one the classical legend formed the show and the Dutch tragedy was its hidden

meaning, in *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* the story of Aeneas is merely the invisible framework that underlies the presentation of local history. Classical antiquity is now used to build upon, not to shelter under, and the men of Holland, who in *Palamedes* used the Greeks as their masks, take them in *Gijsbrecht* for their models. The poet's motive was different. Hatred was his prompter in the earlier play, love in the other, love of the city whose present he would honor by this dramatic episode from its past.

The poet's appeal to civic pride met with immediate and hearty response. The many who possessed little Latin and less Greek cared not for the heroes of Homeric fame, but they did care to see with their own eyes that the past of their city had its heroes and a tragedy as rich in glamor as the sack of Troy. The new rich whose money had purchased them manors and added the manorial titles to their bourgeois names liked to fancy themselves the descendants of the Aemstel heroes and the heirs of their martial glory. As officers of the civic guard they strutted in costly finery through the streets of Amsterdam, proud of the honor which was theirs, if not through personal valor, still by right of inheritance. Vondel's drama gave the sanction of history and poetry to these romantic imaginings. *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* became the eponymous hero of seventeenth-century Amsterdam—*genus a quo principe nostrum*—and the legendary founder and patron saint of its civic guard. On Rembrandt's famous canvas of the sortie of Captain Frans Banning Cocq's company, commonly known as the Nightwatch, which he completed in 1642, one of the two chief figures in the centre, Ruytenburch,

lieutenant and self-created Lord of Vlaerdingen, bears in the chased border of his steel collar the name Gijsbrecht van Aemstel. There is no evidence to prove any mutual appreciation between the painter and the poet; a parvenu's vainglory, who wanted to go down to posterity as the wearer of an Aemstel heirloom, must account for this inscription that links the two together.

The drama was dedicated to "Hugo Grotius, Ambassador of the Queen and Crown of Sweden to His most Christian Majesty, Louis of Bourbon, King of France and Navarre." "We trust," he wrote, "that this dedication will displease Your Excellency the less since here, among the oldest and most eminent nobles and allies, is seen to die in armor, not without glory, the Knight Heemskerck, a noble and brave scion of that race from which Your Excellency takes origin." Thus the poet himself gave encouragement and sanction to the search for mediaeval ancestors. But there were other and weightier reasons than a family connection with one of Aemstel's heroes that made Vondel inscribe the play to the Swedish Ambassador. Grotius himself had made a name as a playwright, and his third, and last, Latin drama, *Sophompaneas*, had been translated by Vondel into Dutch, in 1635. The Latin original had been written in Germany, shortly before Grotius accepted the offer of the Swedish ambassadorship. It was more than a mere exercise in Latin verse wherewith to while away the time. It was an allegory of his own life, the Hebrew Joseph at the Court of Egypt being the Hollander Grotius on the point of entering the service of the crown of Sweden, hopeful of being able, on his Swedish post, to serve his native country even as Joseph, in Egypt,

had been of service to his own people. Grotius realized that by entering the service of the Swedish crown he cut himself off for good from his native Holland, and he may have written his play in justification of that step. The man who was an exile through his country's ingratitude made his exile irrevocable by his own act. To a brother dramatist, who at the same time was an exile from Holland, Vondel dedicated his tragedy of *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*, the Amsterdam hero who also was banished into foreign parts. Joseph, Gijsbrecht, Grotius! To Vondel, who loved to discover parallels between the past and the present, there was nothing incongruous in the grouping of these three into a trio of like-fated heroes, and his picture of Badeloch, who loves her husband better than her children—for she bore them under the heart, but he is himself the heart, without which she has no life—reminds one of Grotius' brave partner in exile, Maria van Reigersbergh.

Grotius replied to the dedication with the following letter:

Myn Heer,

I am much obliged to your civility and great affection for me, you being almost alone, at least one of a few in those parts, in seeking to relieve the troubles I have suffered and to requite my unrewarded services. I have always highly esteemed your gifts and works. If I should say about this work all that I feel, I might be suspected of wishing to acknowledge the honor which is done me by its dedication, the which, however, I can not do adequately either in that or any other way. To others I will speak of the fortunate choice of this actually

recorded, but by you beautifully decorated, story, which is appropriate to the city of Amsterdam, where this work was written and staged; of the well-proportioned arrangement of all its parts, from first to last; of its wise teachings, tender sentiments, and fluent though well-knit verse. To yourself, I shall only say that I consider Amsterdam fortunate if there be many who can value this work at its worth. The Colonean Oedipus of Sophocles, the praying women of Euripides, did not do greater honor to Athens than Amsterdam receives herewith. And since I trust that this work is immortal, I derive from this the hope, which my own works dare not promise me, that my name will remain alive in a city which I have always highly honored. I owe you great gratitude, the which I will preserve in my heart undamaged until I find some opportunity to show it you in deed. At Paris, the 28th of May, 1638.

H. de Groot.

There was one group of people in Amsterdam who did not join in the chorus of praise: the Calvinist divines and their faithful flock. They had always been hostile to Coster's Academy, and the new Theatre inherited with the traditions and functions of the Academy the hatred of the ministers of the Church. The stage, in the eyes of the preachers, was a place of abomination, a nursery of immorality and crime, and they never tired of lodging protests with the burgomasters against the performance of such plays as were especially offensive to their feelings. The occasional prohibitions that their remonstrances elicited were only a meagre satisfaction for the



official disregard of the consistory's anathema against the stage in general. There were charitable reasons, apart from considerations of tolerance and liberalism, not to forbid these dramatic entertainments. For the Academy and, after it, the *Schouwburg*, handed two-thirds of the receipts from its theatrical performances to the city orphanage and the remaining third to the municipal old-men's home. The magistrate, by forbidding the plays, would have acted against the city's own interests, and even the most consistent among the ministers saw the wisdom of moderation in phrasing their protests against a popular amusement that helped to feed the fatherless and dependent old age. The play of *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*, however, could not be tolerated. The consistory had heard it described as a drama in which "the superstitions of popery such as the mass and other ceremonies" were glorified, and deputed two of its members to the burgomasters to insist on its prohibition. They were humored in their protest against what they considered to be a desecration of Christmas, but more than a postponement of the opening performance could not be obtained from the magistrate. The première took place on the fourth day of the new year, and on twelve subsequent days during January and February the "superstitions of Popery" were seen and applauded by a full house. The play was revived in the last week of 1641, and acted in all 121 times during the poet's own lifetime. And since then it has become an honored tradition, still religiously upheld at the present day, to stage *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* for a short run about Christmas. Thus Vondel was vindicated by his



own age and by posterity against the censure of "those foolish people," as Grotius called them, "who would not suffer, in a tragedy dealing with a story of three hundred years ago, the presentment of the customs of those days."

Still, the ministers were less foolish than Grotius would have us believe. Vondel's conversion to the faith of Rome, nearly four years later, was to confirm their apprehension that the "superstitions of popery" were brought upon the stage to glorify them, rather than out of deference to historic truth. Rumors of the poet's altered feelings were in the air, and the ministers, with an unfailing instinct for the detection of apostasy, scented the motive and the purport of these popish episodes in the play. Vondel's friendship for Cornelis Gysbertsz Plemp, the Catholic lawyer, was an open secret, and Plemp being an authority on the early history of Amsterdam, it was more than likely that the poet had consulted him and had received some Roman Catholic instruction into the bargain. The dedication of the play to Grotius tended to strengthen the suspicions of the preachers. For Grotius' advocacy of a common Christianity irrespective of creed had made him suspected of being in favor of restoring the mediaeval supremacy of Rome. *Grotius Papizans* is the title of a pamphlet published in 1642 by the Reverend Laurentius, who was one of the two deputed by the consistory, in 1637, to ask from the Amsterdam burgomasters a ban upon *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*. The charge of popery which then was published in cold print was, five years earlier, already a subject of table-talk in Amsterdam, and the divines,

in their rôle of guardians of the true faith, had good reason to suspect the poet who placed his exiled Gijsbrecht under the patronage of the exiled Grotius of paying tribute, as a convert of Rome, to a potential brother convert.

## VI.

### A CONVERT TO ROME

In 1650, Vondel brought out a volume of collected poetry, which included the following simple lines:

#### *Touchstone*

If Roman or un-Roman verse  
Should, Reader, win your praise or curse,  
Don't blame the pen that wrote this rime,  
But judge the matter by its time.  
Saint Paul admired the Pharisees,  
Saint Augustine the Manichees,  
Before they saw the shining light  
That chased the darkness from their sight.  
My youth was by inheritance  
Bound to one sect, till by good chance  
A clearer vision came to me  
Of this world and eternity,  
And in a more resplendent day  
I found the pearl that hidden lay,  
For which one loses all with gain.  
'They're blest who to that best attain.

He was like unto the man that was a merchant seeking goodly pearls, and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it. For the Kingdom of Heaven, which he had found through the Mother Church, Vondel willingly lost "all with gain." He knew what his conversion might cost him: the affection of friends, the applause of admirers, the favor of patrons, his good name with the public. But the poet,

who was a good merchant in the buying and selling of silks, was himself the best judge of where his spiritual profit lay. He would have sold all that he had to buy the one pearl of great price.

Vondel's conversion was not the sudden impulse of an impressionable fancy. His poetic career, as we saw, was a slow but steady progress, and the change in his religious convictions was in unison with it. In fact, he did not attain to the fullness of poetic power until he had learnt to pray his Ave Maria. Song and prayer were the twin fountains that sprung from the depth of his soul, and when the prayer gained purity and strength from the pressure of a new fervor, the song rose with it to yet unattained height. His life's journey had Rome for its predestined end, but he was long on the road and slow in reaching his destination. For many and composite were the inducements and motives by which he was led on, zigzag-wise, to the distant goal.

He found his way to Rome via Cologne, his native place. The impressions of his childhood were ever vivid in his memory, and he felt his heart drawn towards the episcopal city which, dear to him for its early associations, became dearer still as he came under the spell of the Catholic Church. He never shared the Calvinists' intense hatred of popery, and he never shunned, as a Baptist, to make a reverent allusion to what, in Calvinist cant, were called popish superstitions. He tells us, in 1613, of a brother-in-law who, on a visit to Rome, had received the Pope's blessing, and he wishes that his Muse may get her share of it. In 1622 he sings the praise of St. Agnes and dedicates the song to a Catholic priest. Translating a Latin poem of his brother Willem

written in Rome in 1625, he makes him refer to the Pope in these words:

This is the Keeper of the Key  
To Heaven's gate. 'Tis not for thee  
To question more. To kneel 'twere meet  
And kiss his venerable feet.

In the elegy on the death of his wife, in 1635, he describes a vision of her brought back from the grave and asking him "to inter her mortal part in the chancel of the Blessed Virgin from whom so many, and she among them, take their name." The Baptist Vondel had, evidently, no quarrel with Rome; on the contrary, he felt an unblushing admiration for her, as if the sufferings of his grandparents and parents under the Spanish Inquisition had left no impression on his mind. If sometimes, in his early poems, the "whore of Babylon" came in for the hackneyed obloquy that was the stock-in-trade of Calvinistic polemics, it was in compliance with what he felt to be expected from him, rather than an expression of his own feelings. And as early as 1622 he took care, in reprinting these poems, to excise such anti-popish Billingsgate.

It may well be that the memories of liturgical splendor which, as a child, he must have seen in Cologne—processions along the crowded streets, services in the Cathedral surreptitiously watched, perhaps, in spite of parental injunctions—made an impression on his artistic sensibilities that no domestic tale of persecution, however often repeated, could entirely obliterate. The domestic tradition lost its character of an indictment against the Roman Church when he saw Calvinist intolerance and self-righteousness resort to persecution of

non-conformists in their turn. He fancied he heard St. Peter's rooster over the gate of the hospital crow "O no, O no!" in reply to his question, whether the fighting cocks in the Dutch Reformed consistory behaved much better than their predecessors of the Roman Catholic faith. It was six of one and half a dozen of the other. The Roman Catholics were now the persecuted and, as such, made an appeal to Vondel's generous temperament, which was always ready to side with the underlying party. The household story's fading brought his personal recollections of Cologne into relief. In a beautiful ode addressed in 1632 to Gustavus Adolphus "to intercede with His Majesty for the safety of Cologne, my native city," he pictured the ecclesiastical pomp, the Roman bishop's staff and milk-white mitre, and the city's coat-of-arms: the red field—symbolic of the blood of the eleven thousand virgins whom Attila with his Hunnish hordes did massacre in its ancient streets—with the three golden crowns of the wise men from the East, whose sacred bones are preserved in the crypt of the cathedral. Might the Swedish King, at the sight of these tokens of the ancient city's holiness, restrain his wrath, and allow himself to be conducted into its precincts not as a martial conqueror but as a peaceful guest! The Baptist poet appealed to the champion of Protestantism to spare his native city because of its sacredness as an archiepiscopal see! Vondel saw nothing incongruous in that. Susceptible to the architectural beauty of the ancient city of convents and churches, and sensitive of the charm that attaches to all relics of the past, he could not help feeling reverence for that ancient glory, though it was symbolic of a faith that he had

been taught to despise. But his artistic instinct now taught him to despise the lesson. A symbol so beautiful could not visualize a despicable creed. It was more than an artistic pleasure in the outward forms of Catholic worship that gave a distinctly Roman imprint to the play of *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*. Its poetry is more than a colorful description of past glory; it paints a worship that was an inwardly experienced reality to the dramatist. The devotion which, in Catholic Cologne, he used to watch with wondering eyes as the idolatry of erring strangers, had, to the greater wonder of his soul, become his own in Reformed Amsterdam.

When *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* appeared, Vondel had not yet entered the Mother Church. He stood on the threshold, but the definitive step into the sanctuary was yet to be taken. It is significant of the share that recollections of his early childhood must have had in his conversion that, at this time of hesitation at the portal, his mind turned to the city of his birth and set to work on a tragedy of St. Ursula and her eleven thousand virgins. In this play the poet set out, through the speech and the example of St. Ursula and her companions, to justify the ways of Rome to his countrymen. These tender brides of Jesus, these martyrs of the Church, who through their death became the chosen instruments to save Cologne and Christianity in German lands from destruction, were a shining example to Vondel. How could he, a native of St. Ursula's city, lack courage to suffer abuse and detraction when he was called to bear witness to the truth? The drama was a manifesto by which the poet gave notice to all who might be interested that he intended to enter the Roman



Catholic Church. Its purport was clearly understood. "Although the tragedy of the Virgins," says Brandt, "was worthy of praise as a work of art, there were matters found in it that grieved many people, such as the poet's drift towards the tenets and customs of the Roman Church, and his inclination towards its errors."

Cologne and its memories, however, were only one factor among many that made Vondel a Roman Catholic. Sentimental reasons unenforced by the approval of his intellect would not have swayed him. The head had to sanction the heart's insistent urge before he yielded. Conscientious as an honest merchant in all that he undertook, he devoted years of thought and study to the problem. As a Baptist he was untrammelled from the start by dogmatic prejudice and doctrine. His fellow believers were simple folks whose ideal was unity of spirit on the basis of the first Apostolical communities. Few pledges were demanded from them beyond recognition of God's word as the only source of authority. That simple belief made them averse to the elaboration of a dogmatic system. In their conception there was no room for Calvin's doctrine of predestination. He who was re-born through his belief in Christ could not be stained with the sin of previous generations. The sin of Adam had been atoned for by Christ, hence the man who died in sin died in his own sin, not in the sin of others. And those who sinned were responsible for their error. For theirs was a free will and the power to fulfill the commandments of God.

Young Vondel re-experienced in spirit the enthusiasm of those early apostolic communities over the steady extension of the Christian faith among all nations. But

what had become of the unity of spirit achieved in that blessed past? The Reformation had split Europe into two hostile camps, and among the Protestants there were hatreds more fierce than the hatred which they felt for the Papists. He saw the Arminians persecuted by the Calvinists; he saw his city give shelter to the Brownists whom the Anglican Church had expelled, and even among his Baptist flock the unity of spirit was far to seek. For about 1625, the brethren were divided over the question whether God's word was solely contained in the letter of Holy Scripture and in Jesus Christ himself, or in the teachings which Christ imparts to us through the working of His Spirit. The mysticism of Schwenkfeld, who attached more weight to the promptings of the inward voice than to the written word of God, had come down the Rhine from Germany to Amsterdam. Vondel saw the danger of a movement that would make individual exaltation a court of last appeal in spiritual matters. In a vigorous poem he administered to the community his *Antidote against the Poison of the Fanatics in defence of the written word of God*:

Man's fickle brain is apt to cast God's word  
In various moulds, and Christians are tried  
And tossed by many storms. Woe follows woe.  
But truth, a rock amid the world's wild sea,  
Resists the brain's tempestuous waves, that aye  
Are driven aimlessly by doctrine's winds.

The need of an unshakable, infallible authority was with Vondel not merely a logical conclusion brought home to him by the disastrous effects that were worked by the vagaries of mysticists. It was innate in him, and gave direction to his life and work. He could not live

without the conviction that the way he lived was in obedience to a moral law eternal and unalterable as the God who had made it. He could not write without the belief that the way he wrote was in conformance to an absolute norm of beauty governing the realm of art as life was governed by the moral law of Jesus Christ. The works of the great poets of classical literature, Virgil, Sophocles, Euripides, were to him the written revelation of absolute beauty, and Vondel, in the fullness of his power, no less humbly and devoutly worshipped those three as his masters than he tried to conduct his moral life as the great Master had taught him in the Gospel. He believed in a divine cosmic order which was beauty in the absolute, and he became more and more fond, as he grew older, of the idea that Christendom should strive to reflect in its own existence the harmony that pervades the universe. But how ill did reality correspond to that ideal. "The Christian princes," he laments, "wage war upon each other, and Christianity is like unto a ship that, with a broken mast, is thrown on her beam ends. The fierce Turk, who crucifies Christ, watches our quarrels. Satan laughs in his sleeve, hoping to strike his claw into the heart of the blind conflict and be its umpire. Like water bursting the dike, the Turkish hordes will flood the German land and wash their blood-stained reins in the Rhine at Cologne. There will they stable their horses. Then will Christians know how sadly they have erred and won a cursed spoil through internecine war, seeing the wolves set upon the sheep-fold of Christ."

Attila, whom God had used as a scourge for an unregenerated world, had revived in the Turk, and Europe

was even worse prepared to meet the menace than she had been twelve centuries before. Was the faith in Christ so pure and fervid that it could work again a miracle such as St. Ursula and her companions achieved when by their martyrdom they saved Cologne and the faith it stood for in German lands? How could it be a pure faith, seeing that the various sects of the faithful, while each claiming to believe in Christ, denounced one another in His name? Grotius was right, he thought, in maintaining that the further one went back into the past, to the days of the early Christians who lived nearest to the time of Jesus, the purer one would find the faith in Christ. That faith had been preserved, as a sacred heirloom, by the Church of Rome, whose interpretation of Holy Writ had, therefore, an authority far transcending the Protestants' arbitrary understanding of it, as it had been handed down, under God's mercy, by a long succession of His Vicegerents on earth. It must have been this interest in early Christianity that made Vondel choose Constantine the Great for his hero when he set his mind on writing an epic. It was not the hero that attracted him but the hero's age, not the greatness of the Christian Emperor, but the purity of the Christian religion.

Grotius, without intending to make a proselyte for Rome, had doubtless a share in Vondel's conversion. He did not think in terms of sects but of nations, and to him the all-important problem was not how to justify nonconformity but how to formulate a creed to which all nations could feel justified in conforming. Not the differences that divided the churches but the fundamental principles on which they agreed were worth his

study. With an optimism that seems naïve to our after-wisdom he hoped that the willingness to make concessions on minor points of doctrine would be universal. In bad verse he wrote a good treatise on the true religion, and gave it wider publicity by translating it from the original Dutch into Latin prose. But though the book was repeatedly reprinted and rendered into many languages, it did not create a spirit of compromise. Papists and Protestants might approve of his catholic religion, but each clung to the belief that their own faith improved upon it. Hence Grotius, unable to obtain concessions, himself conceded more and more to Roman Catholicism as being the nearest approach to a catholic religion. He seems to have been a Romanist at heart before Vondel was won over, but, more critically minded than the poet, he never could persuade himself that the deep veneration which he bore it could justify an unconditional surrender. The reservations which his reason made silenced the Ave Maria on his lips.

Vondel was different. Though he shared Grotius' longing for a catholic church that would end the schism and restore religious peace to Europe, it was also peace for his own soul that he was seeking. The melancholy from which he suffered in the early twenties was, probably, the shadow of the doubts that trailed, with thunder of despair and flashes of clear vision, across the horizon of his mind. In Grotius' heart the season of thunderstorms was past. He had found peace in the catholic religion that he taught. He could afford to stay outside the Church of Rome, for, though his belonging to it might have won him greater influence in the world, it would not have made him more conscious than he was

of the peace within himself. But Vondel was still far from that inward serenity. His more passionate nature was swayed by aspirations and despairs, by doubts and by fervors, that made him long for the moment when he could acquiesce with all his heart in an authority too great and venerable to be questioned. Grotius, for all his admiration of the Mother Church, remained a Protestant in his sturdy reliance on the self-found truth, Vondel, always in need of an outward sanction for his convictions, was a potential Romanist from the start.

In the *Litterae Annuae* of the Jesuits, in which they reported the progress of their activities to the Vatican, Vondel is on record as having entered the Church of Rome in 1641, not long after his daughter Anna had become a communicant. He must have passed the year that preceded the fateful step in prayer and meditation, and in discussions with his spiritual advisers. To judge from the absence of any publications in 1640 and 1641, the poet's voice was hushed in approaching the altar. In a letter addressed to Pope Clement X, of 1670, the honor of his conversion is claimed for the Jesuits, and Vondel confirmed that claim by putting his signature to the missive. The civil authorities of the Dutch Republic were more lenient towards the activities of the Society of Jesus than could be reconciled with what the Protestant divines considered to be their duty. In the treaty under which, in 1579, the provinces had concluded their union at Utrecht, it was stated that "every individual shall be free in his religion, and no one shall be persecuted or examined on account of his persuasion." The Dutch Reformed Church, it is true, proclaimed in its confession of faith that "the office of the magistracy is to prevent



and to eradicate all idolatry and false religion, and to destroy the kingdom of the Anti-Christ." But the States never acted according to that ecclesiastical doctrine. They refused to see a crime in adherence to Rome. An inquisition such as the ministers demanded would only have resulted in proving that the suspect was of a persuasion which he had a perfect right to hold.

Still, the authorities were aware that the Catholics were citizens with a twofold allegiance, which made it imperative for the Government to be on its guard against them. Hugo Grotius, at the commencement of the twelve years' truce with Spain in 1609, consulted his learned friends of the university of Louvain, a stronghold of Rome in the Spanish Netherlands, as to the question whether a Roman Catholic citizen of a Protestant State could conduct himself as an obedient subject in all that pertains to the State and not to the Church. The answer was that Roman Catholics were obliged to do all in their power to regain the apostate territory for their lawful sovereign, but only when there was a chance of the attempt being successful, as, otherwise, they would get themselves into trouble without benefiting their prince. They were then, confessedly, potential rebels and traitors, and the States, for political and not religious reasons, issued ordinances, *plakkaten* so-called, against the holding of popish conventicles. These were never enforced but served as a rod in the pickle, ready to be applied in any emergency. Unscrupulous officers of the peace made good use of the rod in the gentle art of graft. Every year the Catholics under their jurisdiction were threatened with strict enforcement of the ordinances; and every year the calamity was warded



off by the officer condescending to accept a handsome stipend from the Roman congregation. Both the bribe and the protection it procured were considered a matter of course by either party, and a magistrate who left the papists unmolested without charging them for a new lining to his pocket was a *rara avis*.

The Sheriff Hooft was one of those few white crows among the flock of blacker dye. The estrangement between him and Vondel after his friend's conversion was largely due to Vondel's naïve assumption that Hooft could be bribed into leniency towards Roman Catholics. For Hooft, at that time, had a law suit pending before the Court at Brussels about some real estate in the Spanish Netherlands that belonged to his wife, and Vondel, anxious to be of service to his new-found fellow-believers, warned him in a letter that he should grant greater freedom to the Catholics under his jurisdiction than they already enjoyed, "as otherwise he might come to grief at Brussels." Vondel must have intended his message as a friendly hint, but Hooft, to whom it seemed an attempt at blackmail, scornfully told him to mind his own business. The renegade's blind zeal betrayed him into a sad error of judgment, which Hooft could never bring himself to forgive. Vondel never knew, or pretended not to know, Hooft's real motive for dropping him. He sent the sheriff his wishes for "a healthy and happy New Year, and since he forbids me his Calvinist table because of a simple Ave Maria, I shall sometimes read an Ave Maria for him, that he may die as devoutly Catholic as he shows himself devoutly Politic." Hooft was of nobler mettle than Vondel cared to

acknowledge. He was not the kind of man to prefer his room to his Roman company. It was not the Catholic whom he forbade his table, but the old friend who did not avoid offending him when his new friends needed to be pleased.

The new friends were many. For, thanks to the wise connivance of the burgomasters, the papists in Amsterdam formed a large, though inconspicuous, community. Their compulsory effacement made for closer intimacy among themselves. They sought each other and kept in touch with Catholics in the neighboring towns of Holland. In Alkmaar, not far to the north of Amsterdam, lived Maria Tesselschade, a convert as Vondel and dearer yet to him since she shared his new-found peace. To her he dedicated the first great poem with which he broke his long silence. Rome, the goal of his pilgrimage, was the scene of this new drama, the third in the trilogy of his conversion: from the Catholic past of his adoptive city, by way of the city of his birth, to the eternal city on the seven hills where he was re-born to a new and better life. *Peter and Paul* is its title and—as in *Virgins* and, incidentally, also in *Gijsbrecht*—the glory of martyrdom its theme. Through their death Christ conquered the ancient conquest of the Cesars. From their dungeon they warred, with prayers and tears for weapons, against the imperial court, humility, whose emblem is the crown of thorns, defeating pride crowned with laurels.

In a dedicatory poem to Eusebia, a name by which Maria Tesselschade liked to call herself, Vondel addressed her as one who shared his religious enthusiasm:

What is the body hung with worthless splendor,  
The flesh, that must decay beneath the sod?  
They are but food for grubs and worms, a hinder  
To that which is most precious unto God.  
That is the life in His own likeness moulded,  
The heavenly soul imprisoned in the clay,  
Which longeth for the flight, with wings unfolded,  
Up to the blessèd home it loves for aye.

She had, as Vondel, lost those who were dearest to her, first her husband, then her only child. Grief had not made her a self-pitying martyr. She had retained her grace and charm, and condescended to be wooed in witty verse and playful poetry by the diplomat Huygens and Barlaeus the scholar, both widowed as she. But the mood in which she accepted their homage was the polite resignation of a woman of the world, who with a smile can join others in the game that she knows to be futile. Her deeper self, less articulate than Vondel's, was in harmony with his, and the adorable Tessel whom Huygens alternately courted and teased with graceful sonnets and punning epigrams on her going to mass was less real than the Eusebia for whom Vondel wrote his *Peter and Paul*.

Vondel felt himself a modern Linus, who, after the death of the two Roman martyrs, "comforted the oppressed with God and with the present and future glory of the saints." The proselyte felt it his duty to call others to the faith that gave him peace. In 1645 he published an ode on the tercentenary of the Miracle of Amsterdam. The event which he celebrated was one of those mediæval incidents which the Calvinists sneered at as popish superstitions. On the Tuesday before Palm Sunday, in the year 1345, a man on his deathbed received

the last sacraments, but in a vomiting fit gave back the host. A woman who nursed him threw both vomit and host into the fire. But the eucharist was not consumed by the flames. It shone with a white brilliance and a woman who saw it put her hand into the glow without burning herself and rescued the sacrament. It gave clear evidence of its miraculous power, the sheriff of the Count of Holland, called in as a witness, testified, over his seal, to its holiness and to the miracles it worked, and on the spot where it was found in the fire a chapel was built to hold the sacred host as a precious treasure. Vondel's friend and spiritual adviser, Father Leonardus Marius, parish priest of the *Oude Zijde*, published at Antwerp, in 1639, a little book that told the story of *Amsterdam's origin and rise to fame through the memorable miracles that happened there to and through the Holy Sacrament of the Altar*, and Vondel, six years later, could not let the three-hundredth anniversary of the miracle pass without an offering such as he could give to decorate the feast. The ode was printed as an appendix to a didactic poem in three books on the *Mysteries of the Altar*, in which he explained to the unconverted the beauty and the meaning of Holy Communion, the Adoration, and the Mass.

It required some courage to publish such a book in the teeth of a militant and victorious Calvinism. Hooft, in a letter to Barlaeus, likened Vondel to those professional fighters who stick their knives into the doorposts by way of challenge to passers-by, as if to say, "pull it out if you dare." He pitied the man "who seemed to be tired of nothing sooner than of rest." For a poem in praise of a "fictitious miracle" and of the "popish mass,

that cursed idolatry," as the Heidelberg Catechism has it, could not pass unchallenged. Instead of converts for Rome the poet won for himself abuse from anonymous rhymesters, whose art was worse, however, than their spite. More painful to Vondel was an attack of his enemies with weapons from his own poetic arsenal. In 1644 he had consented to the publication of his collected minor poems, at the instance, he tells us, of some patrons and lovers of Dutch poetry. In a letter to "His absent Friend" placed at the end of this edition he marked it with the stamp of his approval as containing everything that he recognized as his, apart from a number of larger works, mostly dramas, which he specially mentioned. Such poems as were not included in this volume he rejected as immature and hastily scribbled productions, which deserved to be forgotten. But his enemies did not intend to forget them, nor to heed his warning against reprinting them. They brought out a second volume of *J. V. Vondel's Poetry*, made up of everything that Vondel had disavowed and of some things besides that were unjustly ascribed to him. One of the items was entitled *Copy of certain verses by Joost van den Vondel previously published and contained in a Poem which he made on the Death of King Henry the Great*. In these lines the murder of King Henry by Ravallac was called one of the fruits that grow from the baleful seed which the whore of Babylon sows in the world. The original edition of the complete poem is not extant, the earliest known version being of 1622, which does not contain these incriminating lines. But they seem actually to have formed part of the poem as originally printed in 1610. To flourish them, however, thirty-seven years

later, in the convert's face, was a feeble device for showing him up as a weathercock. A weathercock so rusty as to take more than thirty years in turning from north to south would fail to live up to that proverbial shiftiness which is his only claim to reliability. Vondel had not been blown to and fro by all winds of belief; he had, like an expert skipper, steered his course, by the compass of his conscience, through adverse winds and tides towards the distant harbor of his hope.

The man who was chiefly responsible for this unauthorized edition of Vondel's poetry was, doubtless, young Gerard Brandt, acting, it is believed, at the instigation of Jacob Westerbaen, a minor poet of The Hague. Both were Arminians and belonged, as such, to the party which, in the days of Oldenbarnevelt, had found in Vondel a bold and enthusiastic champion. But the poet's conversion had estranged him from his Arminian friends, and he turned their indifference to hatred when, shortly after Grotius' death, in 1645, he published under the title of *Grotius' Testament* a collection of extracts from his friend's latest writings—especially from his polemic with the Leyden professor Andrew Rivet—which he selected and arranged so as to prove that Grotius had died a true Roman Catholic. The book appeared anonymously, but the identity of the compiler did not remain a secret very long. It was dedicated to "all who are good of will and scattered outside the Roman Catholic Church," and its implied purpose was to gather these within the Church's fold with the help of Grotius' authority. For Vondel naïvely believed that the example of so great and famous a scholar would dispel all anti-popish suspicions and prejudices. On the title-page of



the *Testament* the place of publication was given the fictitious name of Peacetown. But instead of its promoting peace, the book brought Vondel's former friends up in arms. Grotius, who had suffered imprisonment and exile for his support to the Arminian cause, was revered among Arminians as one of their spiritual leaders, and thus to expose him, as Vondel did, as a believer in the superstitions of popery was a slanderous attempt that should not go unpunished. The second volume of *J. V. Vondel's Poetry* was their Arminian revenge. If Vondel thought that he could prove from Grotius' own writings how good a Roman Catholic the great Arminian had lived and died, they would prove from Vondel's poetry how insincere a papist he was himself.

Brandt, at that time, was a young man of just over twenty. The hotheadedness of youth may be pleaded in extenuation of his crime. For a crime it was to call up the young Vondel of more than a generation ago as a witness against himself in his old age. We cannot remain consistent with the truth save by growing inconsistent with our past selves. What man would not be proved to have forsworn himself if his seventieth year may be held responsible for what his twentieth spoke? Brandt, long before he reached seventy, made atonement for the injustice his younger self committed against Vondel. His biography of the poet is a worthy monument to Vondel's memory by which he has won oblivion for his own fault.

Thus to be sinned against, though it pained his generous nature, carried for Vondel a soothing comfort in that very pain. The martyr's own blood is the balm of his wounds. And Vondel, though a victim of slander,



could still thank his slanderers for making him a witness to the Truth. He was enlisted in the venerable succession of martyrs, a minor one for his suffering but acceptable to God for his willingness. The legendary lore concerning the early martyrs became to their humble successor a theme which it was a sweet comfort to dwell upon. In 1642 he published the *Epistles of the Holy Virgins*, a sacred adaptation of Ovid's *Heroides*, which he had first translated into prose as a preliminary exercise for that devotional work. These twelve *Epistles* appeared with a *Dedication to the Holy Virgin*. If beauty achieved is the test of an artist's emotional sincerity, Vondel's adoration of the Virgin was as genuine as was the pearl of great price that the merchant of the parable bought. For it became music in this hymn, more impassioned and majestic of movement than anything that had yet received rhythmical expression in the language. Thought and sound in this hymn are as one, the twin wings of his exaltation, soaring with even beat into the infinite. For the thought, it seems, could not have taken shape save at the modulation of that very music, the sound could not have harmonized without the noble burden of that very thought. The need to adore and the transport of adoration, which woman in the flesh had never satisfied nor evoked, became an experience of transcendent reality to Vondel when his prayer rose to the Virgin, the Mother of our Joy.

The procession of the twelve virgin martyrs formed, as it were, the opening pageant to the drama of *Mary Stuart or Martyred Majesty*, which appeared in print in the year 1646. The play was dedicated to her great-grandson, Edward, Count Palatinate, who first among her

descendants had honored her blessed memory by returning to the Church of Rome. In Vondel's presentation of her tragic end Mary Queen of Scots was put to death in defiance of the divine right of kings and for her steadfast adherence to the true faith. "Therefore she now shines deservedly among the blessed stars of martyrdom in God's clear heaven, at the feet of the Virgin whose name she so worthily bore."

Vondel's preoccupation with English history dated from a few years before the appearance of the drama. In 1641 he had vented his wrath over the execution of the Earl of Strafford, and three years later he wrote a *Lament over the Rebels in Great Britain*, whom he called "Semi-Jews and stubborn Sabbatarians, who crucified their god-anointed Kings." English Puritans and Dutch Calvinists were birds of a feather, black birds of ill omen croaking death and disaster to God-ordained authority. It escaped him that these semi-Jews were doing exactly what the Dutch had done when they revolted against their sovereign lord, the King of Spain, a revolt which, in his earliest play, he had compared to the exodus of the full-Jews from Egypt. Strafford was a British Palamedes and a brother in martyrdom to Oldenbarnevelt. And in the threatening revolt against King Charles I Vondel saw a repetition, not of the rising of the Netherlands against Spain, but of Queen Mary's tragedy. The majesty of royal power was again in the balance, and by its impending overthrow a blow would be struck at the Church of Rome, for which the King was known to have a secret sympathy. The drama, therefore, was written with a twofold purpose. It was a conservative's comment on the revolutionary turn of

events in contemporary England, expressed, by implication, in the apotheosis of a martyred queen, the victim of Protestant insurgency. For Queen Mary died that Religion might live, and the executioner's block on which she bowed her head to the stroke was, in the bitter phrase of her physician, the altar of the Puritans.

The Calvinists at home, who had been taught to see in Elizabeth, not without justice, the protector of Dutch freedom and in Mary's death a just retribution for her alliance with the servants of the Anti-Christ, read in the drama a fresh attack of their old enemy upon themselves. At their instance Vondel was again summoned before the magistrates. But the verdict of his judges, this time, was even more lenient than in the Palamedes case. He was sentenced to a penalty of one hundred and eighty guilders, which, says Brandt, "caused surprise to many who knew how great a freedom was allowed to writers at this time and to poets even more than to others." The authorities were, probably, aware that the downfall of the Stuarts was impending, and they may have been anxious to placate in advance the party that was expected to gain control of English affairs. The fine was paid by Vondel's publisher, Abraham De Wees, who did not wish the poet to suffer damage by a work that brought profit to the printer. For the condemnation of the book did not stop its sale, as no fewer than six editions appeared in the course of the following year.

Vondel's chief source for his version of Queen Mary's tragedy was William Camden's *Rerum Anglicarum et Hibernicarum Annales Regnante Elisabetha*, the "Annals of English and Irish Affairs during Elizabeth's Reign,"

and he took good care to remind his Calvinist critics that they would find it hard to impugn his authority, since Camden was a Protestant. It cannot be denied that Vondel's drama gives a more historical presentment of Mary Queen of Scots than the picture of her that was familiar to Dutch Calvinists. But the poet was mistaken in his implied application of her fate to contemporary British history. In vindicating the martyred queen he took pleasure in painting Elizabeth as the embodiment of that puritanism which he saw victorious, both in England and Holland, in his own day. The block on which his heroine lost her head was not a Puritan altar. Nor was the age that is called after Elizabeth an age of triumphant puritanism. But the names of Shakespeare and Spenser were unknown to Vondel, and the greatness of the Elizabethan drama was to remain unrevealed to the Continent for yet another century. The Independents, the Sabbatarians, the semi-Jews, whom Vondel hated because he recognized in them the fellows of the art-denying Calvinists of his own country were sacrificing on their Puritan altar the joy in life and the worship of beauty which gave to the Elizabethan era its powerful creative impulse. As an attack on Puritanism Vondel's *Mary Stuart or Martyred Majesty* was an artist's unconscious appeal to the very ideals that were dear to the age of her in whom he, strange to say, saw the hateful embodiment of their denial.

For the joy in life and the worship of beauty were as essential a part of Vondel's being as were his mystic longing for the Virgin and his deep sense of the futility of mortal life. The artist in him took delight in the colorful pageant of man's transient existence, and admit-

ted to his pious other self that pageant's tinsel worthlessness in comparison only to the splendor of the heavenly city of his dreams. And those dreams, again, took their scenery and color from the despised reality of this world. The New Jerusalem where the Queen of Heaven sat enthroned was a kind of sublimated Amsterdam, whose streets were of gold studded with sapphires and turquoises. His contempt of the world was only an inverted aspect of his delight in its beauty. For in his mystic moods he was as one who, bending Narcissus-like over the mirror of his soul, discovers in the reflected image of its stored-up memories a world more wondrous than the reality from which those memories took shape. And gazing intently at the reflection, he came to look upon it as the real, the only and eternal reality, of which our vision of this transitory life is itself but a fleeting shadow.

Vondel, therefore, conceived of history as the record of divine reality projected, upon the bright surface of this lower world, in images that have no independent existence but only serve as allegories of transcendent fact. We can know God's greatness only by the contemplation of that reflected reality, and since God is eternal, all periods of human history are of value and interest. All our accumulated knowledge of the past is allegory, and history, therefore, is twin sister of fiction, the one being a collective, the other an individual experience of a higher life in which the single and the many are as one. Pagan history is not pagan to the student who knows how to interpret its meaning. The story of Virgil's *Aeneid* is something better than a fable of an old city sacked and a new city founded. For Virgil was the

inspired seer who with his story of the fall of Troy prophesied the destruction of an ancient world and prefigured in the Rome of Augustus the coming of the Kingdom of Christ. The Holy Roman Empire was an earthly reflection of the heavenly Sion, and the Christian who yearned for the life in the new Jerusalem could assuage his longing in the bosom of the Church of Rome, which was the spiritual heir and successor of that Empire. Thus Vondel reconciled his intellectual admiration of ancient Greek and Roman culture with his devout belief in Christ as his Saviour. Like Dante he found in the great Mantuan a guide to the gate of Paradise, and he paid him a debt of gratitude by publishing, in 1646, a prose translation of all his works. In the Puritanical atmosphere of Dutch Calvinism Vondel could not draw breath by which to inspire his verse. His conversion to Roman Catholicism was also an act of artistic self-preservation. He took his poetry to Rome, that it might live in the spirit of Greek-Roman culture.

## VII.

### A PAINTER OF SPEAKING PICTURES

From the time when Vondel found peace for his soul in the Church of Rome dates his rise to fame as the country's foremost tragic playwright. This synchronism was, probably, not accidental. Having solved the tragic conflict within himself, the poet saved a reserve of strength for the dramatization of extraneous conflicts. He may have felt like one rescued from the stormy sea who is tempted to relieve his own agony by watching from the beach the struggles of others. He must, besides, have found encouragement for the writing of Biblical plays in the age-old tradition of the Roman Church, which never frowned, as did the Calvinists, upon the visualization of sacred matter. He recalled, in his old age, seeing his sister Clementia, under a Calvinist master, act the part of Moses' sister in a school play at Cologne, and as a little boy at Utrecht he had watched, with wonder and delight, how little David slew Goliath in a play staged, in front of the city hall, by the pupils of the Latin school. Such dramatic entertainments were still in vogue in Dutch grammar schools under the Calvinist régime, but they were not given with the approval of the ministers. In the eyes of the latter to make a play of Holy Writ was profanation, and they opposed their production both in the school



and in the theatre. The Jesuits, on the other hand, cultivated the Biblical school drama as an effective means for the inculcation of good morals, and Vondel found in their approval a justification and a stimulus.

In a poem of 1650 he describes himself as the man who "tried to found the Greek and Roman stage in Netherland." He would have expressed his purpose more clearly if he had applied to the stage these words of Erasmus: "I brought it about that Humanism began nobly to celebrate Christ." For Roman or Greek is his drama only in its structure. The spirit is Christian, and Christ, though invisible Himself, is the central idea from which all action radiates. It is the conflict between Christ and Satan, the dualistic vision of good and evil, that is the leading motif of his dramatic oeuvre. The Scripture itself, in Vondel's eyes, was a grandiose drama revealing God's mysterious purpose, and of that drama the Fall of the Angels, the Fall of Adam, and the salvation of man by the Passion of Christ were the chief and most imposing acts. Though the first of these three is not recounted in Holy Writ, it is an essential part of the *Divina Commedia*, for "among the Prophets it is Isaiah and Ezekiel, and in the Evangelist it is Christ Himself, truest of all oracles, who assure us of the fall of the Archangel and his faction." And all the minor stories that intervene between the fall of Adam and the Crucifixion are variations of the great *leit-motiv*. The Old Testament is only a mirror of the New. "Its sanctuary is hung with pictures that portray the Holy Messiah and foreshadow Him before He appears in His time for the sacrifice." Thus thought the poet at the age of seventy,

and the first drama that he ever wrote, at the age of twenty-five, was already an application of that belief. The chorus that concluded the performance of *Pascha* explained to the audience the deeper meaning behind the show. The Israelites in the power of the Pharaoh betoken the world in the grip of sin and Satan, and as the Jews by their passage through the Red Sea attained release from temporary torment, even so mankind, through the fountain of Christ's blood, was saved from the eternal pain of hell. The land of Canaan is a symbol of the New Jerusalem, to which Christ, the greater Moses, will show His followers the way. And as the blood of the Paschal Lamb upon the lintel and on the two side posts of their houses protected the Israelites against the avenging sword of the Lord's destroyer, even so Jesus Christ, the last Paschal Lamb killed on Mount Calvary, will protect us from God's wrath with the garb of His mortality dyed red by His innocent blood. Moses and Aaron's failure to lead Isaac into the land of Canaan signifies that the Old Law was too short a ladder by which to climb up into the Heavenly Fatherland out of the fire of God's wrath. That could only be done by Jesus Christ, in whom lives the plenitude of God.

In his later plays this allegorical purport is less crudely revealed or, with better artistic effect, not revealed but merely hinted at by subtle suggestion. But though the manner differs, the matter is always the same: Jephthah's daughter dying to atone for another's sin signifies the passion of Christ; Joseph buried in the well by his brethren and rescued from it to become a ruler of men in Egypt betokens Christ

buried and risen from the dead to sit in majesty at the right hand of the Father; David, after his victory over Goliath, triumphantly hailed by entire Jerusalem, means Jesus Christ entering the holy city on Palm Sunday; David, the savior of the realm, when forced to go into exile "because his table companion dared betray his master," prefigures the savior of mankind who was betrayed by Judas and led on to Golgotha; Samson triumphing in death over his enemies is a prototype of the promised Messiah. In the synopsis prefixed to his translation of Du Bartas' *Magnificence of Solomon*, Vondel explains that the wedding of Solomon and the Princess of Egypt "signifies something greater than greatness itself, to wit, the mystic union of Jesus Christ with His Church; and the poet, under pretext of honoring Solomon's wedding feast, shows us a miraculous dance, to wit, the dance of the heavens, in which fixed and wandering stars have so exactly defined a motion that all other motion is but clumsiness by comparison."

In like manner Vondel conceived, as we saw, of human history as a reflection of a transcendent reality. But its image, being preserved by the fallible ingenuity of man, was blurred in comparison to the flawless reflection of the Scripture, which derived immediately from God. That is why "the sacred histories always carry along with them a certain divine majesty and adorable dignity, which are nowhere so much needed as in tragedies." Subject matter from the Bible surpassed, in his opinion, pagan fables as far as "the sun of the Holy Ghost extinguishes all pagan stars with its brilliance." "The daughter of Sion does not yield

to Hecuba, nor does Jerusalem to ten Troys," says the poet in the Address to the Reader prefixed to *Jerusalem Destroyed*, his second dramatic enterprise, and he proves that statement to his own satisfaction by the following comparison between the destinies of the two cities: "That fictitious quarrel arose from Paris' judgment, this war between Rome and Jerusalem from Pilatus' verdict. Paris gave judgment in favor of Venus to win the beautiful Helena, Pilatus in favor of the Jews to please the Roman emperor. One gave a supposed goddess the apple of discord as a tribute that her beauty deserved, the other laid the cross upon the shoulders of the actually living Son of God because there was no beauty in Him."\* As an allegory, therefore, of the apocalyptic end of the world the destruction of Jerusalem is in every way superior to the fable of the Trojan war, and the fable's chief value is in its resemblance to the fact of Jerusalem's destruction. For such ancient myths as offered striking analogies to the stories of the Scripture outshone the others with a reflected brilliance from the sun of the Holy Ghost: Hippolytus the chaste stands out as a pagan Joseph, Iphigenia borrows glory from Jephthah's daughter, Salmoneus, the presumptuous usurper of Jove's majesty, presumes upon his resemblance to Lucifer.

In this preference for the sacred stories of the Scripture as the fittest subject matter for tragic drama Vondel at eighty remained consistent with his youthful self. His earliest dramatic attempt, of 1612, was a dramatization of the exodus from Egypt, his last original drama, of 1667, was *Noah, or Destruction of the*

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\* An allusion to Isaiah, liii, 2.

*First World*. A "tragi-comedy" *Pascha* is called on the title-page, but to the other twelve biblical plays, all written between 1639 and 1667, that term is no longer applied. It was a name that to the poet who had written *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* must have sounded old-fashioned. It reminded him, perhaps, of the rhetoricians of his childhood, who inserted comical interludes into their mystery plays. De Koning, whom he had admired in his youth, had mixed the comic with the tragic in his plays of *Ahab* and *Samson*. But *Pascha* was not a tragi-comedy in that sense of the word. Young as he was when he wrote it, he decided at once upon the manner in which the dramatist should handle the sacred stories upon the stage, a manner from which he never deviated. A tragi-comedy *Pascha* was called because it was a tragic story with a happy ending. All Vondel's plays, with the sole exception of *Palamedes* and *Mary Stuart*—and those are rather political pamphlets in dramatic form—are tragi-comedies in that sense. For the Christian poet, who saw in all history an allegory of the eternal truth, could not dismiss his audience without a message of comfort reminding them that by the downfall of his hero God's purpose was mysteriously accomplished.

Again, the profound reverence with which he touched the sacred matter in his later plays was already characteristic of the author of *Pascha*. He made Gerard Vossius' maxim his own: "The poet must necessarily say what is said by God's Book; he must say sparingly what it does not say; he must never say what would conflict with it."\* He carried this awe for the invio-

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\* *The Brothers*. Dedication to Gerard Vossius.

lable letter of the Bible to the extreme of consistency. The story of Jephthah's daughter was one of his favorites. His much-admired friend and forerunner Abraham de Koning had dramatized it in 1615, and Vondel had praised that play in a sonnet. But he did not see how he himself could handle the same subject without violating either the hapless unity of time, warmly advocated by Scaliger, or the sacredness of Biblical truth, against which Buchanan, great poet though he was, had notoriously sinned in his *Jephthes*. For the story says that two months elapsed between Jephthah's fatal meeting with his daughter and his sacrifice of her, and since neither could be omitted from the drama, the play remained unwritten for a great number of years. But at last Vondel found a way out of his perplexity. He gathered from some learned authors that Jephthah's victory over Ephraim took place within that period of two months in which the daughter was to prepare herself for the offering, "although the Book of Judges and Flavius Josephus do not relate it in this order so as not to interrupt the story of Jephthah's daughter once begun." So he made Jephthah return, not from his triumph over Ammon, but as a recent victor over the Ephraimites, on the very day set for his daughter's home-coming from the mountains for him "to do with her according to his vow which he had vowed." Thus the unity of time and the majesty of the Bible were kept intact at the loss of the most dramatic incident of the whole story. For the father's sudden revulsion from the elation of victory to horror at discovering the purport of his vow is withdrawn from our sight as a past happening which, instead of being acted, must be recounted. And for a



substitute we witness a meeting without dramatic tension to which the father brings a two-months' old remorse and the child a studied resignation.

Thus the playwright sacrificed his dramatic opportunity as coldbloodedly as did Jephthah his daughter. The Hebrew judge may be more easily forgiven, for he "had opened his mouth unto the Lord and could not go back," whereas Vondel could have gone back in the play to the day of Jephthah's fatal vow if he only had dared to open his mouth against the supposed authority of Aristotle. With his innate respect for authority he never dreamt that the poet is lord of his own creation and has a right to make, and live by, his own laws. At the age of seventy, when he printed his *Jephthah*, he was as naïvely obedient to what he conceived to be the rules of dramatic composition as he was at the age of twenty-five when his *Pascha* first appeared in print. He had, indeed, learnt, in the intervening years, to honor better rules in better models, discarding Garnier for Seneca and Seneca again for Euripides and Sophocles. He realized in his old age that Seneca's plays "are replete with learning but, strained beyond their power, try with loud crying and stamping to deafen the Greeks who all the time retain their natural tone and, like expert musicians, know how to modulate their voice according to the purport of the words." \* But though he could free himself from a once revered model, he never became free from the need to model his own art on the works of the ancients in whom he recognized his betters.

It is difficult for us, lawless moderns, to appreciate

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\* Dedication of Sophocles' *Trachinian Maidens* (1668).



such punctilious observance of conformity in mere externals. For that which Vondel, therein following Buchanan and Garnier, chose to borrow from the ancients was only the scaffolding of his drama. The house to which it served as a frame was of Dutch make, an inheritance of Vondel's mediæval predecessors, which he rebuilt and decorated in a new style that was entirely his own. It was the mystery play of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries sublimated into a drama of high excellence by the beauty of his verse. The rigid design of the frame was, indeed, not essential to that beauty. A more truly native drama might have evolved if the poet had re-modeled and strengthened the loose composition of the mystery play into a nobler shape that still suggested the original lines. But the austere temper of tragedy carries with it a corresponding austerity of method, which makes for strict observance of canons of art. Besides, Vondel lived in an age that cared more for the stern imitations of Roman architecture than for the picturesque style of the Dutch renaissance, and Vondel's dramas resemble those palatial dwellings of the Amsterdam patricians which, behind a classic façade, enclosed the treasures of Holland's own native art. One has to penetrate into the intimacy of those mansions to find, in the semi-darkness of their curtained rooms, the beautiful things that remain concealed to the passer-by. It is even so with the dramas of Vondel. Their ostentatious classicism is apparent even to the casual reader, their beauty is only revealed to those who reverently enter into the inner recesses.

They have the traits of all neo-classical drama; there is more speech than action and what action there be is

often duplicated by the actor's own description of it, as all stage directions are part and parcel of the dialogue. When Levi, in *Joseph in Dothan*, has killed a he-goat to dip Joseph's coat of many colors in the blood, the following speech accompanies and stultifies his action:

This blood supply bright red, my thumb a brush.  
Thus shame I Nature and the painter's art.  
I'll sprinkle it here, there smear it thick, there thin,  
Now tear it, trail it, rend it with sharp teeth,  
Drag it through mud and trample it under foot,  
And mingle in one mass sand, mud, and blood.

The dialogue is often a mere monologue in disguise, the other speaker's part in it being restricted to interruptions that ask for the sequel of the story, which the speaker would have imparted anyhow, and where the poet resorts to the other extreme of the stichomyth, retort follows retort with the artificial regularity of clock-work. The exits are often not motivated by anything that happens in the play, but seem to occur in obedience to the rule that allows no more than three persons to take part in the dialogue. Dramatic thrills are lacking since exigencies of the classical style banned the clash of vehement passions from the stage. The personages are types individualized only by their name, and sometimes the name, as in the case of Jephthah's wife Filopae, even fails of that function and merely typifies the bearer. The very choice of a Greek name for the Hebrew woman is in obedience to the learned authority of Gerard Vossius, who recommends the coinage of a Greek etymon that may denote the person's character or his fate.

These features of Vondel's drama loom large to us

who are accustomed to a stagecraft that sees its greatest triumph in a delusive reproduction of reality. But Vondel was not a realist. "In order that this tragedy," he says in the preface to *Jephthah*, "should be true to life, which is its model, we refreshed our memory by reading and rereading the poetics of Aristotle and Horace, and the commentaries of their interpreters." That is less absurd than it seems. Truth in art was not attained, in his opinion, by copying the life that he could grasp with his senses. The mere copying of something real does not result in art. Art is creation, the making of beauty of a different order, and we find truth in that creation when its beauty is evocative of our own experience of life. The artist aims not at similarity but correspondence between life and art, and when Vondel says he sought to be true to life by the study of Aristotle's poetics he did not mean that from books could be gained a knowledge of life, but a knowledge of the craft that creates that correspondence. He did not aim at creating an imitation of a real world, for that which he dramatized was to him not reality but itself an allegory of the real. The sacred stories of the Old Testament were parables prefiguring the reality of Christ, and the poet who staged them should not aim at a spurious realism but at an allegorical presentment suggestive of that transcendent reality. The stage itself is a miniature allegory of the world, on which all human action must necessarily become transformed by the poet's art to be in keeping with the transformed scene. He presents to us life conventionalized, bound by limitations of style that suit the limited bounds of the stage. The dramatist's problem is closely akin to that of the painter,

and Vondel, aware of this, used to call the show on the stage a speaking picture and the picture on the wall dumb poetry. His own speaking pictures are in the style of the dumb poems of Rubens and have little in common with the more sober and picturesque art of the Holland school. His Flemish descent may account for that preference, but it was shared by the official taste of the time.

The painter of speaking pictures has an advantage over the dumb-verse artist in that he can resort to the other's means of expression as an aid to those which are essentially his own. The *tableau vivant* was a device that Vondel often utilized to enliven and beautify his scene. In the fourth act of *Brothers*—the story of the seven men who were hanged by the Gibeonites in atonement of Saul's cruelty to them—the gallows with its ghastly sacrifice is for a moment revealed to view; in *Mary Stuart* a pair of curtains in the background of the stage are opened on the torch-lit room where the martyred queen's body lies in state; in *Jephtah* those curtains disclose the mourning attendants of the daughter round the urn that holds her ashes. And for this same play Jan Vos, a brother poet of Vondel and for nearly twenty years a manager of the theater in Amsterdam, designed at Vondel's request another *tableau vivant* for a scene allegorical of Jephtah's sacrificial murder.

Moving dumb-shows were also inserted. In the fourth act of *Joseph in Dothan* the caravan of Arab merchants crosses the stage, and a thunderstorm that disturbs the sacrificial ceremony of Ashtaroath in the fourth act of *Solomon* must have proved a great attraction to the

audience. Such spectacles were a concession of the poet to the popular taste. He knew that "the seeing of what happens moves the heart more strongly than the telling of it." In the words for "stage" and "theatre" the Dutch people have expressed their conception of them as show-places. For the Old French *tinel*, meaning "platform" or "scaffold," was changed by popular etymology into Dutch *tooneel*, as if it were a derivative from the verb *toonen*, to show; and *schouwburg*, of which the etymological equivalent in English would be "show-borough," is "a place where you go to feast your eyes." Vondel was too much enamored of color and light to be averse to the painter's intrusion upon his own domain, and it is not unlikely that, in composing his dramas, he visualized some of his scenes by the aid of contemporary artists. The school of Pieter Lastman produced pictures of biblical and heroic incidents that could easily be reproduced upon the stage. In one instance Vondel himself informs us that a picture by Jan Pinas, which he had seen at the house of Dr. Robbert Verhoeven, had inspired to him Reuben's monologue in *Joseph in Dothan* describing in advance the moving scene when Jacob shall receive the bloody coat of many colors and in it the certainty of his favorite's death. The unities of time and place did not allow that scene to be shown on the stage, and, since it could not be omitted either, Vondel had recourse to the device of making Reuben act his father's part in anticipation. The actor must do this without the picturesque assistance of the domestic circle who would with cries and gestures react on father Jacob's horror and join in his lament. Vondel, aware of the difficulty of the player's task, may

have copied his description from the picture to impart its dramatic effect to the verse.

Music was also an essential part of this neo-classical sacred drama. Vondel was all his life a lover of music and, to judge from a chance utterance in one of his early poems, a performer on the lute himself, at least in his younger years. Music to him was an echo of the heavenly harmonies wrought by the revolution of the spheres. The "divine art of song" gave him a foretaste of the beatitude of the angels. When Diedrick Zweling played the organ in the Old Church on Sunday evenings for crowded pews, Vondel was among the audience and felt his soul soar into the eternal life. And when, on his way home, the carillons in the church tower, obedient to the touch of Salomon Verbeek's feet and fingers, pealed their jubilant tones over the city, it pleased him to fancy the angel choirs looking out in rapture and surprise. A sacred drama, therefore, needed for its production the harmonized song of a chorus trained by an eminent musician, that the audience, hearing such heavenly consonance, might feel carried away beyond themselves.

But action, dumb-show, dance, and music, were only accessories to the drama, whose essence was the poet's verse. For the tragedy ought to have such power as to create pity and fear at the sole hearing or reading of the context.\* The word alone must be able to paint and to charm by its music, and as a word painter and musician Vondel is unequaled in Dutch literature. His sacred drama, then, was a poetical and artistic presentment of a Bible story, replete with profound discussion,

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\* Preface to *Jephthah*.



in stately moving alexandrines, of moral and political problems, and destined to edify and to teach the young. It was a mirror for magistrates and a school for sceptics. Its tragic poignancy to a seventeenth-century audience was rather in its faithful adherence to the familiar story than in the dramatic tension upon the stage. For the spectator's intimate knowledge of the plot precluded his suspense. If the show took his breath away, it was due to nothing unexpected but to surprise at finding everything realized as he himself remembered it. And the debates on questions of theology and morals were as fascinating to him as to a modern audience are debates on socialism and party politics. The Amsterdam playgoers were, at least, entertained by professional actors, who had the greatest poet of the age for their prompter, two attractions that our political debates do not possess.

In a number of prefaces to his printed plays Vondel has taken occasion to express his views upon the exigencies of dramatic art. Most of these utterances are borrowed from the learned authorities whose wisdom he held more entitled to belief than his own expert knowledge: Scaliger, Heynsius, Vossius, the great lawgivers of the neo-classical drama. In the preface to *Jephthah* he has given the fullest and clearest context of his dramatic credo. He looked upon that play as a model example of its kind, fit to be used by would-be playwrights for "a stage compass wherewith to steer their perilous course past lurking rocks and shoals of lawless composition into the wished-for port of perfection in dramatic art." For that reason he discarded in this play his favorite alexandrine for lines of ten and eleven syllables because "Ronsard, the prince of French poets"—



he must always defer to an authority—"judges this metre to be loftier and more sinewy than the alexandrines, which, being longer, are slacker, in his opinion, and verge upon prosaic utterance, unless—a concession significant of Vondel's estimate of his own verse—proceeding from the pen of an eminent master, they excel like exquisite pictures and, richly adorned and perfected, become far removed from common parlance and intercourse." The story of Jephthah yielded the true matter for a tragedy because the conflict is represented as being between near relations. And Jephthah, who is neither a stainless saint nor an abandoned sinner, is of the mettle that makes a tragic hero. The reverse of fortune is exemplified both in the mother and the father, her premature excessive joy turning to extreme grief and madness, his unholy zeal to a terrible and almost unconsolable remorse. The speech is adapted to the station and character of each person in the play, "as otherwise the good and the bad would be intermixed and the theatre, to the detriment of political authority, prove a school of vices, not of virtues."

The notion that the stage, as a school of virtues, could lend support to the powers that be was zealously propagated by the poets. Hooft, in his *Histories*, stated it bluntly and rather cynically: "There are only two ways, in our time, of leading the people by the ears, namely by means of the pulpit or through the stage; and the magistrates, therefore, have no more effective means than the stage to impress upon the mob a quiet subordination and to maintain their own dignity as against the authority of the clergy." Jan Vos, in his

capacity of manager of the Theater, recommended on similar grounds his house to the burgomasters:

The players and police protect the city's  
  lords,  
The players with their rôles, the others  
  with their swords.  
The altars' fire is quenched by fear of sword  
  and play.  
Where play is nor police, the pulpit will  
  have sway.

The authorities were of the same opinion and often gave evidence of their official appreciation and regard to Vondel. In 1648, when the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia was festively celebrated in Amsterdam, it was the Catholic Vondel who was asked to compose the inscriptions for two stained-glass windows which the burgomasters ordered to be placed in the Old Church as lasting peace memorials. They also accepted the dedication of a couple of poems on the event together with Vondel's exuberant praise of themselves as "fathers of peace and fathers of the country." They probably honored the poet, in their turn, by their presence at the première of *The People of Liondale*, the play which Vondel was probably requested by the managers of the Theatre to write for the occasion. "Melpomene's tragic poet," said the Prologue, "entered for once into the service of Thalia," preferring a rural scene to the splendors of a court. The play is a pastoral skilfully composed of material taken from Tasso's *Aminta* and Guarini's *Pastor Fido*. Liondale is Vondel's name for the Netherlands, and the feud whereby he represents the North and South of Liondale divided allegorizes the war with Spain, which held the southern Netherlands

under its sway. A vivid dialogue, a well-conducted plot, and beautiful lyrical songs by the chorus make this pastoral one of the most charming works of the poet's entire dramatic oeuvre.

But it was only a light intermezzo in Vondel's drama. Tragedy remained his favorite theme. In that same year he published his *Solomon*, whom he presented upon the sacred stage "not in that shape in which he prefigured, in his glory, the promised Messiah, but as plunging from his blessed state into the pool of idolatry . . . by which inconstancy the audience might be incited to constancy in the lawful religion." The great king's fall was an earthly analogue of that greater fall by which the archangel Lucifer lost his throne in heaven, and the writing of *Solomon* may have been a testing of his powers before he undertook that more ambitious theme of the first and greatest rebel against God.

It was a hazardous task that he set himself in the tragedy of *Lucifer*. His words had to picture a scene at the portals of heaven, where in the light that emanates from the Sun of Suns, archangels are the actors. Below them they know, in the centre of the nine concentric spheres, lower than the moon and the clouds, the new Eden with the new-created couple. Apollion has been down there to reconnoitre the place, and the report that he brings back to Belial and Belzebub wakes their envy of man:

*Apollion*

No creature has on high so pleased mine eyes  
As those below. Whose skill could thus entwine  
Body and soul, creating double angels  
From earth and bone? The noble shape attests

The Maker's art, most obvious in the face,  
 The mirror of the soul. Though each limb  
     please,  
 I saw the soul's ray breathed into the face,  
 In which the body's charms concentrated shone.  
 A Godhead beams effulgent through the eyes.  
 The rational soul shines from his countenance.  
 He, lone among the dumb, brute animals,  
 Which downward look, raises his head with pride  
 Heavenward to God, his Maker, whom he  
     praises.

*Belzebub*

And well he may for so much priceless bounty.

*Apollion*

He lords it like a God whom all must serve.  
 The invisible soul's of spirit, not of matter,  
 And whole in every part, the brain its court.  
 It lives eternal, safe from rust or shame.  
 It baffles comprehension. Foresight, knowledge,  
 Virtue and Free Will are its attributes.  
 Its majesty strikes all the angels dumb.  
 The wide world shall ere long with humans teem,  
 Reaping, from little seed, rich crop of souls.  
 And therefore God has mated man with woman.

*Belzebub*

What think you of his rib and loved spouse?

*Apollion*

I covered with these wings my face and eyes,  
 To bridle my affections and sensations,  
 As she came towards me, by her Adam's hand  
 Led through the verdure. Sometimes pausing,  
     he  
 Glanced at her sideways and a holy fire  
 Was kindled by that look in his pure breast.  
 Then Adam kissed his bride and she the groom,  
 And nuptial rites commenced, with an embrace  
 And fire of love that one must guess, not name,  
 A higher bliss that is denied the Angels.  
 How poor is singleness. For us no pairing

Of twofold sex, a maiden and a man.  
Our lot's the worse. Alas, we know no marriage,  
Mating nor mate, in heaven without women.

And their sense of injury is aggravated when Gabriel half reveals and half conceals in veiled language the purpose of God with his new creature. For so much is clear that they must serve him and be content to see him take his place in heaven above themselves. The host of angels, however, is ready to submit to God's will and, having heard Gabriel's message, intones a magnificent hymn in praise of His Majesty.

But Lucifer will not resign himself to his fate. He will rather be the first in some lower court than the second, or a lesser one perhaps, in the blessed light of God.

*Lucifer*

Being a son of light,  
A Prince of Light, I shall maintain what's mine.  
To violence I yield not, nor to tyrants.  
Let fall what will, I will not yield a foot.  
Here is my fatherland. Disaster, failure,  
Nor curses shall intimidate or daunt me.  
We'll perish or we'll get around that cape.  
If fate will that I fall, stateless, dishonored,  
Let fall, if I but fall wearing this crown,  
Wielding this staff, surrounded by this train  
Of faithful and the thousands on our side!  
Such fall will win me imperishable praise.  
Rather first Monarch in some lower court  
Than in the blessed Light second or less.  
I'm fain to risk it, fearing check nor grief.

Belzebub, Belial, and Apollion will aid his revolt. They know how to stir up the lurking discontent among the heavenly hosts. Even Michael's authority can not lay the unruly spirit they have roused, and when the three

deem the moment ripe, Lucifer appears on the scene, seemingly to counsel submission, but actually to lure the rebels into offering him the leadership of their revolt. So well he dissimulates his purpose while speaking the very words that must fan the smouldering fire into flame that, when he receives their oath of allegiance, he seems to yield to their importunity, taking them to witness that only by dire necessity does he assume this burden for the protection of God's realm and in order to ward off their own ruin:

*Lucifer*

My sons, whose faith was never stained by  
treason,  
All that God wills and claims from us, is right.  
I know no other Right and as Vicegerent  
Prop His decree and counsel with my shoulder.  
The sceptre in my right hand I received  
From His omnipotence, a pledge of grace  
And token of God's love towards us all.  
If now his heart be set upon this Adam,  
And if He please to give him plenitude  
Of power supreme, yea, above you and me  
To crown him, though we never failed our duty,  
What can we do? Who contradicts His will?  
If only Adam had received a glory  
Coequal with our own angelic nature,  
'T were possible to bear for Heaven's scions,  
Grown from God's stem. Now wrath might stir  
them up,  
If wrath were not held for a stain on high.  
Howe'er one take it, twofold is the peril,  
Whether we yield for fear or manfully  
Resist. I wish He may forgive your wrath.

*The Rebel Angels*

O Lord Lieutenant, do accept this staff,  
And guard our sacred Right. We follow thee,  
We follow, take the lead on rapid wings.  
We'll fall or else triumphantly prevail.

*Lucifer*

This breaks our oath and Gabriel's command.

*The Rebel Angels*

That breaks God's law by setting man 'bove  
God.

*Lucifer*

Let God maintain His Majesty and throne.

*The Rebel Angels*

Maintain thine own. We will, as pillars, stay  
thee  
And, at the same time, stay the Angels' state.  
Man shall not trample on our crown, God's  
crown.

*Lucifer*

Field-Marshal Michael, armed while God will  
pour  
His blessings, will soon meet us with his host.  
How small a power is ours compared to his!

*The Rebel Angels*

If not one half, one third of Angeldom  
Shalt sweep with thee if thou but choose our  
side.

*Lucifer*

Then will the die be cast, and favor lost  
With the oppressors of your Right.

*The Rebel Angels*

The courage,  
The insult, shame, despite, despair, and caution,  
Rancor, the wrong that war alone can mend,  
And what depends on these, will nerve us  
fighting.

*Belzebub*

We have the Holy Kingdom in our power.  
Whatever be decreed, arms give it force  
And sanction. If we but array our ranks,  
All who now waver, soon will join our side.



*Lucifer*

I'm then resigned to parrying force with force.

*Belzebub*

Then mount the steps, O bravest of the brave,  
Vicegerent, mount this throne, and take our  
oath.

*Lucifer*

Prince Belzebub, and you, illustrious lords,  
Apollion, Prince Belial, bear witness,  
That under dire constraint I take this charge,  
God's realm to guard and to avert our ruin.

*Belzebub*

Bring forth the standard that by it we swear  
Loyalty to God and to our Morning Star.

*The Rebel Angels*

We swear one oath by God and Lucifer.

But Lucifer cannot dissimulate his real purpose to the omniscience of God. God knows by what towering ambition he is driven, and he sends Raphael to the archangel to plead with him and promise him mercy if he desist from his fatal course. Raphael's words make him realize the enormity and the abortive nature of his crime. He stands already vacillating when suddenly the trumpet sounds summoning the faithful hosts of Michael to God's banner. That makes him persist in his rebellion, but without hope of victory he goes to battle. Despair drives him on to fight and to fall. And Raphael, with the chorus of faithful angels, kneels down in prayer to God for His mercy:

*Chorus of Angels*

O Father, who dost dearer hold  
Than hymns and frankincense and gold

The resignation and the stillness  
Of one who, in humility,  
Rejoices to be led by Thee,  
And, in Thy will resolved, be will-less,

Thou seest, O stem that bore us all,  
The highest of the angels fall  
From his obedience to the Almighty,  
And stir the trumpet and the drum  
And, blinded by ambition, come  
Upon his chariot to smite Thee.

Have mercy on their heinous deed,  
Avert, avert the fatal meed  
From thousands of our fellow creatures!  
For lamentably led astray,  
They don their armor for the fray,  
Revolting 'gainst their better natures.

*Raphael*

Be merciful, O Father, spare  
Thy Lord Vicegerent, who would wear  
The crown of crowns and sit asunder  
Above all others, next to Thee,  
In triumph. For who else shall free  
The archangel from such stains, we wonder?

*Chorus of Angels*

Permit not that the fairest one  
On whom Thine eye its mercy shone,  
Permit not that he fall to curse Thee.  
Let him atone the ingratitude,  
And keep him in what state he stood,  
Be he forgiven by Thy mercy.

The course and outcome of the battle are related to Raphael by Michael's shield-bearer Uriel. But their joy in the triumph does not outlast its telling. He has hardly finished speaking when Gabriel brings the sad news of Adam's fall. The fallen archangel has taken

his revenge on God, and excluded after all His creature from Heaven.

*Gabriel*

The battle lost, his scattered host he gathered,  
But first his captains, who abhor each other,  
And, to avoid the all-seeing eye, he chose  
A hollow cloud, a somber murder cavern  
Of mist lit by no fire but from their eyes,  
And, ringed around by his infernal Council,  
He, from his seat, thus spoke, bitter 'gainst God:  
"Ye powers who proudly for our righteous cause  
Have suffered this defeat, 't is time to venge  
Our grief and, craftily and full of wrath,  
Persecute Heaven, with vengeance unappeased,  
In His own chosen image, and to smother  
Man in his first ascent before he gain  
Strength in his sinew and increase his kind.  
My aim's to ruin Adam and his brood.  
By making him transgress the first-made law  
I'll fasten on him an indelible stain  
That, foul in body and soul, with all his race  
He'll never set his foot upon the throne  
From which he ousted us. Yet, should it happen  
That some ascend, a small and tiny number,  
And those through labor, pain, and deaths  
untold,  
Will rise unto the state they envied us.  
Then miseries, forthwith, in Adam's trail  
Will spread throughout the wide world, without  
end,  
Nature will languish, ravaged by that blow,  
And wish to turn into a void and chaos.  
I shall see Man, whom God made in His image,  
Estranged, degenerated from God's likeness,  
The lustre gone of memory, will, and reason,  
The inborn brightness dimmed and darkened,  
yea,  
The fruit in mother's fearful womb, bewailing  
The light, fall prey to Death's relentless jaws.  
I shall, emboldened, set up Tyranny,  
And offer you, my sons, made deities,

Gold, frankincense, and cattle on the altars  
Of countless temples raised unto the sky,  
Yea, damn as many as no tongue can name,  
All Adam's brood, to all eternity,  
By crimes done in defiance of God's name.  
So dear will cost his triumph and my crown."

*Michael*

Presumptuous curse! He still dares challenge  
God!  
Erelong we'll teach him how to stop that crime.

*Gabriel*

Thus spoke Prince Lucifer, and Belial  
Was sent to forthwith bring about Man's fall.  
He dons malignity itself, the slyest  
Of beasts, the snake, to deck with sheen of words  
The bait, which thus seduced the innocents,  
As he hung twisted round the branch of knowl-  
edge:

"Has God, on pain of death, denied thee then  
The freedom of this fruit, the best tree's taste?  
Eve, simple dove, it is not so! thou errest.  
I pray thee, see this apple. How it shines  
And glows alike with crimson and with gold.  
This feast invites thee, daughter, pray, come  
near:

Here nests no venom in this deathless verdure.  
The fruit's enticing, pluck! I swear, 't will give  
Thee light and knowledge. Art afraid of  
scandal?

Go to, and equal God in wisdom, knowledge,  
In love, in honor, and in majesty,  
Though He'll be jealous. Learn the difference,  
The essence, kind, and quality of things."  
Forthwith the fair bride's heart is all ablaze,  
Aflame with longing for the fruit thus praised,  
The fruit enchants the eye, the eye the mouth,  
Lust guides the hand to pluck, all in a tremor,  
She plucks and tastes and eats (woe to her seed)  
And Adam too, and when their eyes go open

And see their nakedness, they deck with leaves  
 Of fig their shame and sin original,  
 And go to hide themselves 'mong trees and  
     shades,  
 To hide, in vain, before the all-seeing eye.  
 The sky becomes o'ercast. They see the rainbow  
 Stretched as a sign and warning of God's plagues.  
 The heavens mourn. Wringing of hands, nor  
     wailing,  
 Nor weeping can avail the man and woman.  
 The lightning flashes, and the thunder rolls.  
 All that one hears and sees is fear, fright, sighs.  
 They flee their shadows, but they cannot flee  
 The worm that gnaws the heart conscious of sin.  
 With sagging knees they stumble, foot by foot,  
 Their faces deadly pale; the eyes, deep drowned  
 In tears, descry no light. Their hearts have  
     sunk.  
 Yet man held high his head a while ago.  
 A rustling leaf or brook, the faintest noise  
 Scares them, the while a pregnant cloud  
     descends,  
 Bursts, and brings forth a light and radiant glow,  
 From which the Highest issues, in that sorrow,  
 And thunders with His voice, which fells them  
     down.

But Gabriel knows also God's promise to the sinner  
 whom He exiled from Paradise: He will raise from the  
 seed and blood of the first woman the Strong One, who  
 shall crush the serpent's head. And the Chorus of Angels  
 concludes the play with an appeal to the Savior:

O Savior who shalt crush the serpent's head,  
 Free at the appointed time from Adam's sin  
 Fallen mankind, and open here above  
 A fairer paradise for Èva's seed,  
 We count the ages, years, yea, day and hour,  
 Wherein Thy Mercy come and drooping nature  
 Triumph, restored in body and in soul,  
 Peopling the throne from which the Angels fell.

Thus the three main acts in the grandiose drama of the world, the Fall of the Angels, the Fall of Adam, and the Salvation of man by Christ, were condensed by Vondel into one tragedy. Lucifer is its hero on the stage, but with his rebellion and defeat the destinies of man have their rise and fall. Man's history, from his creation in Adam to his apotheosis in Christ, is the real theme, of which the play on the stage is the allegory. And more beautiful allegory was never conceived by Vondel's imaginative genius. He was one of those rare souls who, in their inspired moments, do not translate into words their vision and experience of life, but on the contrary experience their vision in words. The wonder of his verse is in the gift, which he possessed to a high degree, of making his words evocative of emotion and thought. Of the genesis of his poetic creation it may be said that in the beginning was the word, and the word was vision. They were not two but one, a mystic unity, the vision of his mind's eye being experienced as a verbal emotion. In *Lucifer* this does not happen intermittently. From first to last, through five long acts, the poetry is true to its high theme. If ever Milton needed another poet's inspiration, to Vondel's *Lucifer* he might have turned for aid. But Milton the poet had nothing to learn from Vondel. If he did read *Lucifer*, it was with a scholar's interest to see how the Dutchman had handled the subject matter that he had chosen for his epic.\*

The tragedy was staged in the Amsterdam Theatre on February 2, 1654. The second performance was to

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\* Those who would like to make a comparison between Vondel's drama and Milton's epic are referred to Mr. L. Ch. Van Noppen's beautiful translation of "Vondel's Lucifer" (Greensboro, N. C.: Chas. L. Van Noppen, 1898).

take place on February 5th. On that day the consistory met and listened to complaints about the production of a drama in which "in a carnal manner the profound mysteries of God were represented with many objectionable and profane fables," whereupon three from their midst were delegated to the burgomasters to protest against the show. These yielded to their demand, and, although it was too late to prevent that evening's performance, Lucifer was thereafter banned from the stage. The authorities even humored the ministers so far as to confiscate the printed edition, with the result that five other editions followed one another in rapid succession before the end of the year.

Official disapproval was followed by anonymous criticism. One rhymester who attacked the poet of *Lucifer* accused him of having written it only seemingly for a moral lesson, and asserted that it actually was an attack upon England, whose Protector was the Lucifer of the drama. There was some ground for the charge. In a poem of 1644 Vondel had called the English Independents "satellites of Lucifer who hoped to usurp his Maker's sceptre," and in a satirical poem of five years later *On the Parricide in Great Britain*, Cromwell was called "Lucifer in disguise." But these utterances only prove that at the time they were written the tragedy of *Lucifer* was already conceived in the poet's mind. They do not prove that the play was a deliberate elaboration of those similes. To Vondel the theme was too sacred to be abused for a political diatribe.

"The loss incurred by the Orphanage and the Old Men's Home in consequence of the closure of the costly and ingenious stage heaven, after two performances of



*Lucifer*, induced me to write the tragedy of *Salmoneus*," wrote Vondel in the preface to this play. It was not the theme that attracted the poet, it was the stage machinery that attracted the theme; and the poet was employed to make one fit the other. Salmoneus, King of Elis, aspiring to a power equal to Jove's, had the market place in front of his palace fitted out like Jove's heaven and played the god's part with a counterfeit thunderbolt until he was whirled to his death by a real one from the sky. The city's orphans and needy old age were to look for support from this madman's fake heaven, since none could be had from God's own. It did yield the expected bounty. For after seven performances in the fall of 1657, Vondel's play had spent its run, but "*Salmoneus' Ballet of the Gods*" was revived the next season, the spectacle without the poetry. The play appeared in print with a preface to "*All Fellows in Art and Advocates of the Theatre*," which confronted its opponents with an imposing array of unassailable witnesses for the stage. "Even Theodorus Beza, whose zeal preserved the State and Church of Geneva in that same purity to which Calvin had reformed them, has left us his tragedy of Abraham's sacrifice," Vondel reminded them with undisguised glee. If so holy a man did not scorn to write for the stage, how could Vondel sin by treading in his steps?

The answer to that question had been given by the Reverend Petrus Wittewrongel, author of *Oeconomia Christiana* (1655), before it was raised by the poet. "It is one thing," he wrote, "to write and read an edifying comedy or tragedy, and another to act it for money in a pagan manner with so many devices for carnal amuse-

ment." Vondel, who wrote his sacred dramas for production on the stage, was in his eyes "a teacher of lies, a propagator of vanity, frivolity, and pagan godlessness." In 1661, he brought out a second edition of his book, which he dedicated to the government of Amsterdam. The burgomasters rewarded him for his pains with a gift of 250 guilders (\$100). This official endorsement of the minister's crusade against the theatre drew Vondel out of his tent. He retorted with *Stage Shield or Plea for the Right of the Stage*, a prose pamphlet in which he drew a parallel between actor and orator, both bent upon edifying or entertaining their audience. If one is good, how can the other be bad? To condemn the use of the actor's art on account of its abuse would leave nothing good under the sun. That were to uproot all vineyards because of the abuse of the wine. And the Psalmist says wine maketh glad the heart of man. The new City Hall, the stained-glass windows in the churches, the sculptured doors of the organs, yea, the minister's carved pulpit, are decorated with sacred and secular images, and images are the books of the laity. Why then should the stage not be allowed to show such images alive?

Still, from Wittewrongel's standpoint, the standpoint of the Calvinist who had been taught a profound distrust of human nature, the distinction between the writing and the acting of plays was consistent and wise. The appeal to the senses is direct and more vivid on the stage, and the visualization of vice, though it be shown as a deterrent, has a suggestive charm for the morally weak that the guardians of Christian morality had good reason to fear. The ill repute in which the actor's profession was held also reflected on the stage. The individ-

ual player might be a good Christian and citizen, he could not raise his calling in the eyes of the public. There was sin in the very act of dressing up as a member of the other sex. In the early 'fifties of the seventeenth century women's parts were still acted by men. In 1655 the first woman actress made her début on the Amsterdam stage. But that innovation did not conciliate the Calvinists. On the contrary, the mixing of the sexes was worse than the former disguise. Men acting as women gave less offense than women acting with men. When in February, 1666, the Theatre, after half a year's closure for rebuilding purposes, was to be opened again, the consistory sent the Reverend Lupenius and an elder to the burgomasters to plead for a permanent padlock on its doors. "We are the watchmen in the tower," they told the magistrates in justification of their interference. But the four rulers of the city were, as usual, opposed to extreme measures against the stage, and dismissed the petitioners with the reminder that the watchmen might not blow except as they were ordered and instructed by their masters. The only satisfaction the Calvinists obtained was a ban against the use of God's name on the stage.

The new Theatre was inaugurated with an allegorical play by Jan Vos. Vondel's vogue was on the wane. He remained, at eighty, as productive as ever, but the sacred drama that he wrote had run its course. It never had a monopoly. The romantic drama in the manner of the Spaniards and the English had always been popular with the Amsterdam playgoer. Kyd's *Spanish Tragedie*, Tourneur's *Revenger's Tragedy*, Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, were familiar to him in Dutch translations. Jan Vos

also wrote a play of this genre, *Aran and Titus*, in which twelve murders are committed before the eyes of the audience. Vos knew no English, but he probably refashioned an early version of *Titus Andronicus* by the Utrecht rhetorician Adriaen van den Bergh, who also translated the *Spanish Tragedie*. In 1647 the author of *Aran and Titus* was elected manager of the Theatre, and he remained in that position for twenty years, except for one short interval in 1652. The applause of Barlaeus, who had hailed his *Aran and Titus* as a work of genius, had made his reputation for good.

Brandt, who did not like Jan Vos, accuses him in his *Life of Vondel* of having wilfully marred the effect of Vondel's dramas on the stage by assigning the parts to inexperienced players and dressing them up in worn and ungainly costumes. Enough is known, however, of Vondel's relation to Vos, a fellow Roman Catholic, to stamp that story a falsehood. If after 1660 Vondel's sacred dramas were less often performed in Amsterdam, it was not Vos that barred them but the public's lack of interest. Jas Vos, as a good businessman, can not be blamed for having catered to the prevailing taste. He could do it without a pang of conscience, for it happened to agree with his own. But as long as the public enjoyed Vondel's plays, Vos was willing to stage them. He produced them, no doubt, not entirely to the poet's taste, with an excessive output of scenery and side-shows that enlivened the stage but stultified the drama. When Vondel asserted, in the preface to *Jephthah*, that a tragedy must be able to create pity and fear by the mere reading of its context, he may have aimed a side-thrust at the producer of his sacred tragedies who made his verse

play the accompaniment to a gorgeous spectacle. But Vos knew his public better than Vondel. He was a time-server, not a champion of an abstract ideal of dramatic art. Success was his aim, not the achievement of beauty. If beauty could bring him success, so much the better; if success could be gained only at the sacrifice of beauty, then beauty had to be sacrificed. And success was appraised by him in terms of money. The proceeds from the theatre that were paid to the houses of charity rose in 1657 to a net profit of ten thousand guilders (\$4000), and even exceeded that amount in the following years. It was at his insistence that the authorities consented to an alteration of the theatre according to plans designed by Holland's greatest architect, Jacob van Campen, at a cost of 36,000 guilders. Movable scenery and an intricate system of winches and pulleys for the delusive imitation of reality added to the attraction of the new building and to the income of the Old Men's Home and the City Orphanage.

Financial success gave Jan Vos the courage of his conviction. His practice required a theory, not to justify it—that was done by the proceeds—but to lend it a much-needed dignity in the eyes of the cultured. So, in imitation of Vondel, who used to preface his printed plays with theoretical discussions, he published his dramatic credo as a foreword to the edition of his tragedy of *Medea* (1667). It is a well-written declaration of independence, unmistakably intended as a challenge to Vondel, whose classical idols are one by one overthrown by this upstart iconoclast. The audience, he announces, will see *Medea* hurl her children to their death and splash their brains and blood into the face of father Jason.

That is against the law of Horace, it is true, but no modern poet need obey that law, since Horace lays it down without reason. For no law can prevail that does not evolve from reason. Antiquity need be followed only where it is right. If its being old were a claim to precedence, the Latins would have to yield to the Greeks, which would be the end of Horace's authority. Horace wrote for the Romans. The Hollanders are a different people, and Vos, a Hollander writing for Hollanders, will go his own Dutch way. If Homer, Virgil, and Ovid, the greatest of all poets, were now living and knew nothing but Dutch, they would still be the same great poets, for Poetry is not a daughter of foreign languages but of the mind's fertility. It is not a mastery of Greek and Latin that makes of a Hollander a great poet, nor did Michiel de Ruyter become a great admiral by studying the example of Pompey. A man is what he is by nature's gift, not by the study of the Ancients. Some of Horace's rules may have been sensible in his day for reasons that do not exist in ours. The restriction of the dialogue to only three speakers is explained by Vossius as necessitated by the dearth of good actors in ancient times, and that great scholar admits the modern poet's right to bring as many speakers into the scene as he has good actors for their parts. Times and conditions have changed since Horace laid down the law, and the modern poet who writes in a free country where free speech is allowed in civic arts must be forgiven his revolt against ancient stage rules which, in the opinion of many dramatic experts, deviate from the track of reason.

Jan Vos thought better than he builded. His zeal for a rationalized drama, free from the shackles of a



pseudo-classicism, came to nought in the attempt to practise what he preached. His was a sterile mind from which no poetry could spring. *Medea* reads like a parody on the genre that it was meant to exemplify. Its production was a triumph of stagecraft, and the applause which the author usurped was won by clever engineers. The play is a series of amazing metamorphoses. A garden changes into mountains, hell into a forest, a tree into a naked child, a guard into a pillar and the pillar into a bear, another into a tree and the tree into a tiger. Charon is seen floating in his barge whose oars suddenly bear roses. The tree of the Golden Fleece, a dragon, bulls, soldiers, and Jason rise out of the ground in fumes and flames and are swallowed up again by the earth. Thunder and lightning crash across the stage, Cerberus barks and spits fire, the crown on Creusa's head ignites by no visible cause, Mercury wings himself through the clouds, Jupiter flies past astride on his eagle, Medea rides in mid-air on a chariot drawn by fire-spitting dragons, Iris descends on a flying peacock which holds a rainbow in its claws, and—the crowning sensation—"a celestial globe studded with stars drops from the sky and opens up into eight parts out of which the seven planets, each personated according to its property, emerge for a dance round the stage, whereupon they re-enter the globe which closes automatically and rises out of view."

Jan Vos would fain have been a Prospero. But he knew not how to summon some heavenly music that could turn this rough magic into poetry. Not upon his shoulders had descended the magic robes. Only one man in Holland could have wrought that charm. But



Vondel, the classicist, the worshipper at the shrine of Sophocles and Euripides, had a nobler conception of his art. It could work a spell by the mere magic of the verse and dispense with the engineer's inventive skill. He realized, at eighty, that the stage had suffered a change by its manager's rough magic and become a place estranged from his art. But he did not break his staff and bury it fathoms deep in the earth. Banished from the little world where he had reigned, he withdrew into solitude with his books and his poetry. *Adam in Exile*, published in 1664, came near to the sublimity of *Lucifer*, and in *Noah*, which saw the light in 1667, he gave his last great tragedy to Dutch literature.

## VIII.

### THE UNION OF APELLES AND APOLLO

It would be wrong to infer from the public's lagging interest in Vondel's sacred plays that his poetic fame was declining. Biblical subjects had lost their attraction, and Vondel, the only poet in those later days to take his themes from the Scriptures, sacrificed his popularity with the playgoer to his lifelong predilection for sacred drama. The poetic worth of his plays was not called in doubt, and the connoisseurs realized that some of his greatest were among the number to which a production was denied.

At the summit of his power, Vondel received an unmistakable token of the high regard in which he was held by the artistic élite of Amsterdam. On October 20, 1653, some hundred painters, poets, and lovers of the two arts assembled at a dinner in St. George's *Doelen*, the guildhouse of the Archers, to celebrate the union of Apelles and Apollo. Vondel was among the guests, and, on entering the room, was greeted by Apollo with a poetic address. Thereupon he was conducted to the seat of honor at the table and, after another divine effusion in verse, crowned with laurels by the god. A song in his honor intoned by all present concluded the ceremony and, the last notes sung, Bacchus took control of the rest of the evening.

We do not know whether Rembrandt was present at the banquet. But this is certain that the guest of honor would not have singled him out as the foremost of the painters and as his equal in the sister art. There were, at that time, discriminating critics who forestalled the unanimous verdict of posterity. Martin Kretzer, a gentleman dealer and art collector, was one of them. Together with the painter Adam Camerarius he appraised the pictures left by the Amsterdam art dealer Johannes de Renialme at his death in 1657. In the inventory made by them on June 27 of that year a picture of "The woman taken in adultery" by Rembrandt, now in the National Gallery, was valued at fifteen hundred guilders, a sum exceeding by nine hundred guilders and more the highest prices occurring, in the same list, after such great names as Dou, Van Dyck, Rubens, Claude Lorrain, Titian, Tintoretto.\* And not only his pictures, but even his drawings and etchings were eagerly sought after in Rembrandt's own lifetime. Johan van der Capelle, the marine painter, was the owner of hundreds of his drawings; Dirck Aertsz, an ill-fated talent of whom nothing but the name has come down to us, left at his death in 1644 no fewer than fifty-four etchings by Rembrandt, then not yet forty years of age; and a nearly complete set of these was in the possession of Jan Boursse, the brother of Esaias the artist. In a poem by Jan Vos on the *Triumph of the Art of Painting* Rembrandt's name heads the list of painters by whose art the city will spread its fame. And Jeremiah de Decker, another minor poet, whose portrait was

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\* Dr. A. Bredius, *Künstler-Inventare* I, p. 230.

painted by Rembrandt, called him "The Apelles of our age."

Vondel, however, had no praise to spare for Rembrandt. For thirty-eight years they lived within strolling distance from each other, but only once does the painter's name occur in the poet's entire oeuvre: "Ah, Rembrandt, paint us Anslo's voice. The visible part is the least of him. The invisible is known only through the ears. He who wants to see Anslo must hear him." Cornelis Anslo was minister of the Baptist congregation to which Rembrandt belonged and which Vondel was then on the point of forsaking for the Church of Rome. The preacher does not seem to have harbored any grudge against the waverer since he asked him for an inscription to his portrait. For the light which it throws on Vondel's relation to his old fellow believers the lines are significant. They do not tell us, except by their silence, what the poet thought of the portraitist. He purposely avoided to praise or to blame him by praising the sitter's unpaintable eloquence. No one could blame the artist for the limitations of his craft.

After all that has been said, in the preceding pages, about Vondel's poetry and the canons of art that he revered, one need not wonder that he lacked the understanding for Rembrandt's genius. Vondel measured all artistic achievement by the standard of his classical models. Modern epic was good or bad in so far as it did or did not conform to the type set by Virgil, modern drama had no right to evolve its own laws since no laws could improve upon those that Aristotle had formulated. He could not comprehend an artist who, if he did recognize any authority, strove not to follow but to surpass

its models, trusting no guide except his own artistic conscience. Rembrandt was guilty, in his eyes, of the very sin by which the Jephthah of his tragedy wrought his own fall. For instead of obeying the priest, who condemns the intended sacrifice of his daughter as a crime not willed by God, Jephthah takes counsel with his conscience only, and that tells him, in its ignorance, that true to his vow he must destroy his daughter. Even so Rembrandt disregarded, in Vondel's judgment, the established canons of art to follow a course of his own uncertain choosing, by which he was bound to lead his art to destruction. In *Jephthah*, Vondel the Catholic subtly personified his vision of Protestantism, and Rembrandt, the independent seeker of his own artistic salvation, was, indeed, the great Protestant of art. There could be no reciprocity of admiration between the poet who accepted the law from Augustan and Papal Rome and the painter who was a law to himself.

Vondel's way of acknowledging the honor which was done him at the banquet in St. George's *Doelen* was characteristic of his attitude towards art. He dedicated, a few weeks later, his prose translation of *Q. Horatius Flaccus' Odes and Art of Poetry* "to the Fellows in Art of St. Luke, at Amsterdam, Painters, Sculptors, Draughtsmen, and their Patrons." He sent his brethren of the brush and the chisel a message from the classical lawgiver of poetry, that they might discipline their talents with his counsel. For what is good for the poet is good for the painter and the sculptor, since their arts, "being all three based upon measure and number, cannot dispense with geometry, which fact, instead of detracting from the glory of these arts, makes them seem more

divine; for of God Himself, the Creator of all things, it has been said by the Oracle of Wisdom that 'He has ordered all things by measure, number, and weight.'" The cosmic harmony must necessarily find its reflection in the creations of art, and that art seemed to Vondel most worthy of praise and admiration which showed in its composition the artist's conscious reliance upon the aid of geometric formulas.

In Vondel's estimate the greatest painter of the Netherlands was Rubens, the Fleming, whose art he felt to be the pictorial counterpart of his own. When he visualized a scene in his drama of *The Brothers*, it was of Rubens that he thought as the painter most able to render in line and color the vision suggested by his poetry: "David sits in melancholy mood on his high throne. One gets a glimpse, through a gateway in the background, of the fields that are parched by the drought. Under the vaulted roof of the court, a magnificent structure of marble and cedar, hover some cherubs, who, with the painter's accustomed ingenuity in emblematic presentation, are each made to impersonate the very idea that is relevant to the whole. One of them seems to pronounce sentence over the Brothers from a partly unfolded scroll, another betokens by means of a stopped-up waterspout that the sky is withholding its rain. This pair, with a smoking torch and a fan, signify heat and an oppressive atmosphere. Those others seem to impersonate two tribes, to wit, the one who with a laughing face flies upward with crown and sceptre: Juda, the other who, confounded and sad of face and drooping his head, tries to seize the falling crown: Benjamin. Others again are getting an iron chain in readiness to

lock round the necks of the criminals. And one expresses with scales and sword the justice of the punishment. Saul's doomed descendants are seen standing before the judgment seat and offer a pitiable sight as Benaiah, at a wink of the King's eyes and directed by his outstretched sceptre, extracts lame Mephibosheth and little Micha from the crowd; while the Gibeonites, with vengeful and inflamed faces, insist upon their right on one side and, on the other, are assailed by the wails and tears of despairing Michal; and the tottering old widow, resting her trembling right hand on a stick and her left on the right shoulder of her maid, implies by a laughing face that, out of her mind with grief, she does not know what she is saying."

The passage is worth quoting at length because it is significant of the kind of art that Vondel admired, a classical grandeur with a taste for the baroque in decorative detail. He looked for literary qualities in a picture. From an artist who was merely a man of skill, nothing truly great could be expected. A painter should have learning to guide him to the top of his profession, and a knowledge of Latin and the classics was as essential to the maker of dumb poetry as it was to the designer of speaking pictures. It was not Vondel alone who thought so, the official taste of the time agreed with him. Even Constantine Huygens, the poet-diplomat, who was one of the first to perceive in the young Rembrandt the promise of his later fame, held the same views. Between 1629 and 1631 he began, and soon left unfinished, an autobiography in Latin, which contains a long chapter about the painters of the period that he knew personally. Amongst others he mentions Jan Lievens and Rembrandt,



in whom he recognized boys of great promise, both famous before they had grown a beard. But he could not praise them unreservedly: "They are so self-satisfied that they do not reckon it worth their while to visit Italy. If they had studied there, their art would be perfect." Rembrandt knew better. That which he could learn from the Italians—the pose of a model, the composition of a group—he could learn from engravings, and by means of these he did study and learn from Raphael. But as a painter they had nothing to teach him. He knew, better than Vondel, that beauty is omnipresent, and surrenders itself to the genius of the artist who discovers it. An historical canvas on a large scale by an Italian master may fascinate us more than the portrait of a homely burgher, but its greater fascination results from an appeal to our intellect, which reads a story in the painting, and not from a sense of its greater beauty. But it was the story that Vondel always looked for in the picture, and by its telling qualities he judged its worth. In 1657, when Rembrandt, in the eyes of connoisseurs such as Martin Kretzer, was the undisputed master of his craft, Vondel wrote an elegant poem in praise of Pieter Lastman's picture of the *Sacrifice at Lystra*. Lastman, an exponent of the Italian manner, had counted Rembrandt among his pupils, and in Vondel's eyes he was, half a century after his death, still the greater man's master. For "our Apelles," as he called him, "had in this picture constructed his scene with so much knowledge that even the genius of Rome and Greece never winged itself up to greater height."

Of the painter's technique Vondel understood but little. He could not discern merit in the masterly execu-

tion of a simple subject that told him nothing. The great genre painters of Holland, who portrayed not the heroic but the homely, Jan Steen, Pieter de Hooghe, Johannes Vermeer of Delft, owe not a particle of their enduring fame to Vondel's eulogy. Brandt tells an amusing story of how easily the poet was misled in the appraisal of the painter's work. The Archbishop of Malines, to whom he dedicated his *Mysteries of the Altar*, sent him with his thanks a picture in return. "At first, out of ignorance, he was pleased with the present, believing it to be an artistic piece of work, and he reciprocated that supposed benefaction with a beautiful poem; but when the connoisseurs saw it and told him that it was a worthless copy, he became so disgusted with the gift that he sent it as a present to his sister Katharina van den Vondel at Hoorn, not wishing to keep that hateful reminder of a poor reward before his eyes."

Another time Vondel was betrayed by his love of the Italian manner into composing a rhymed advertisement for a collection of Italian pictures of doubtful authenticity. The art dealer Gerrit Uylenburgh, who specialized in Italian art, sold, in 1671, to the Elector of Brandenburg thirteen canvases ascribed to masters of the first rank. The Elector had them examined by the flower painter Hendrick van Fromantiou, who declared all but one to be fakes; whereupon the twelve that he condemned were returned to the Amsterdam dealer. Fromantiou had been in Uylenburgh's employ and knew that his workshop turned out more copies than prosperous pupils. Remembering the poor pay he received, he seized this opportunity to pay it back with heavy interest. Uylenburgh's reputation as a dealer was at

stake, and he appealed to the Amsterdam government for redress. The magistrate appointed as arbiters nine painters, among whom were Gerbrand van den Eekhout, Philip de Koninck, and Johan Lingelbach. They found some of the pictures of good quality, a few of them less good, but all deserving of a place in a collection of Italian art. But that judgment was offset by the findings of seventeen other painters, including Jan Wijnants, M. de Hondecoeter, and Willem Kalf, who testified on behalf of Fromantiau that they were fakes. No fewer than fifty-one experts were called in to give their opinion, of whom the majority, thirty-one in all, gave evidence in favor of the dealer. But since the Elector refused to take the pictures back, Uylenburgh had them sold by public auction, and persuaded Vondel and Antonides, a young poet of great promise, to write some commendatory verses wherewith to advertise the sale and prop his badly shaken reputation.

In spite of his inability to discern the true greatness of Holland's native art, Vondel enjoyed unchallenged authority in Amsterdam as a critic. He was the most courted dispenser of public praise, and was always found willing to please a patron with an inscription for his portrait, to laud the art collection of a Maecenas in a hymn, or to raise the market value of an artist friend's work by the stamp of his poetic approval. The painter most praised in his verse was a German, Joachim Sandrart, a native of Frankfurt on the Main. If Vondel had been king, Sandrart would have been his court painter. He was the type of artist that could rise to social prominence in Amsterdam. He had made the indispensable Italian journey and a name for himself at

the Papal Court. With that twofold recommendation he came to Amsterdam about the time of Vondel's conversion. The protégé of Pope Urban VIII, newly returned from Rome, was hailed by the poet on the way to Rome as a fellow in faith and in art. Vondel gave his famous friend a sitting and wrote the inevitable inscription to the portrait drawing. This served as an introduction with his literary friends. Hooft, Dr. Coster, Vossius, Barlaeus, were all taken in by the grand manner of this classical artist, and had their portraits done by Sandrart and, as a matter of course, berhymed by Vondel. In his artless enthusiasm Vondel was evidently not aware that his ambitious friend was cleverly exploiting him as a publicity agent. Sandrart painted a large altarpiece of St. Sebastian's martyrdom for the Elector of Bavaria, and Vondel burnt the accustomed incense, a Mary Magdalene by the painter was addressed by the poet with a rhymed consolation, the "Twelve Months hung at Munich in the gallery of his Serene Highness of Bavaria and painted by Joachim Sandrart" received each its epigrammatic legend, as did also the allegories of Day and Night. Even the treasures in the painter's art collection, marble busts, Italian drawings, and pictures by Raphael and Veronese, received from Vondel their poetic labels. In 1640 Sandrart left the city where he had been courted by Vondel, to court, in his turn, the favor of the Elector of Bavaria, who had called him to his service. The two friends, however, kept in touch with each other. When Vondel, in 1654, published his *Lucifer*, it bore a dedication to Emperor Ferdinand III, whose consent thereto had been obtained through Sandrart, then employed at Vienna. The painter

survived the poet by nearly ten years. In his old age, in 1675, he published in his native language the *German Academy of the noble Arts of Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting*, in which he taught the academic theory of art that he had industriously practised. In that book Sandrart bestowed some condescending praise upon Rembrandt coupled with the insinuation that Rembrandt painted dark backgrounds to conceal his badly drawn outlines. That was doubtless also Vondel's opinion. "Thus Art bears also sons of darkness," he wrote with unmistakable reference to Rembrandt, "who like to live in shadow like an owl; he who follows life can do without fictitious gloom, and, as a child of light, hides not in the dusk." The two friends thought of Rembrandt as a man who, to quote Sandrart, "had failed to keep up his position by always consorting with lowly people, which has, indeed, injured him in his work." Sandrart, who had sought the favor of pope and prince and poet, believed that, in furthering his worldly ambitions, he had won honor for his art. A monarch on his throne, in the flowing robes of royalty, must, independent of the artist's merits, yield a greater picture than the portrait of a common burgher. Even so the poet Vondel could think of no tragic theme that had not a court for its scene and a mighty ruler of men for its hero. The heroic was an attribute only of the great, and tragedy was heroic drama. The suffering of the common people was subject matter for farce or comedy. Vondel discovered nothing beautiful or tragic in Rembrandt's realistic conception of a human Christ at the whipping-post, an emaciated figure of pain borne in patience. In the poet's drama Christ is thought of as a triumphant

Hercules, as "the Strong One, who shall crush the serpent's head, the Hero who shall triumph with honor after the battle."\* By exalting their subject Sandrart and Vondel believed that they could exalt their art, to Rembrandt nothing human was unworthy of his loving observation. He discovered the beautiful even in the ugly, and created art out of poverty and pain.

In the year 1655 Amsterdam inaugurated its new *Stadthuis* or City Hall. The building was a magnificent example of the taste that found its verbal expression in Vondel's verse. An imposing pile of Bentheim rock, severe and forbidding by the predominance of the straight line, the whole building being a cube of gigantic dimensions. But this classic simplicity of outline was relieved by a wealth of allegorical sculpture for which ancient mythology had supplied the motifs. The designs for "the eighth wonder of the world," as the contemporaries called it, were the work of Jacob van Campen, who started life as a painter and, having gone on the recommendable Italian tour, developed in Italy into an architect by the study of Andrea Palladio's works at Vicenza. Constantine Huygens praised him in an epitaph as "the great restorer of well-building's art, who had nerved the foolish flourish of the Gothic style with the manly dignity of Rome and had expelled old heresy with older truth." The old heresy, of course, was mediaeval Gothic, but Huygens, ever ready for a sally against popery, identified the foolish flourishes of Gothic with the popish fallacies of Rome. Van Campen, however, though as an architect a believer in the older truth, clung in religious matters to the old heresy, a

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\* *Lucifer*, II. 2138-2141.



double reason for Vondel to recognize in him a kindred spirit. And indeed, there is so close an affinity between the builder's art and the poet's verse, that Van Campen's City Hall might be described as a poem by Vondel translated into stone. It was a monument erected for all times to the theory of art which he revered, an irrefutable and perpetual justification of his ideal of beauty. To Amsterdam, Vondel foresaw, would flock the talents from all over Europe to study the mysteries of their art in this new City Hall as in the highest school of Pallas Athene!

So great a masterpiece should have its praise of song, and Vondel celebrated the *Inauguration of the City Hall at Amsterdam* in a sonorous poem "dedicated to the Burgomasters and Governors of that city." It is as great a masterpiece of its kind as is the building which it honors. The glory of Amsterdam, whose symbol was the new City Hall, is the main theme, but chiseled into the verse, like the sculptured framework of Van Campen's building, are various episodes of historical and topographic interest presented with much learning and mythological allusion. A tribute to the municipal government that built itself so magnificent a home, a rapid survey of the city's growth from a fishing village to a metropolis, an account of the building's progress and of the calamities—civil and foreign wars, fire, inundation—by which it was retarded, a description of the City Hall Square, the *Dam* so-called, and of its lesser buildings—Church and Exchange, Weigh-house and Fish Market—, and a vivid picture of the busy concourse on the *Dam*, lead up to the inspection of Van Campen's great structure. If the conducting of sightseeing parties



had been an industry in Vondel's days, the guides in charge might have added to the aesthetic enjoyment of their droves by reciting passages from Vondel's poem in explanation of the various scenes of interest. But it was only in the days when no Baedekers were needed that poets cared to dignify a Baedeker's theme.

Vondel also supplied short explanatory verses for the historical paintings that adorned the rooms of the new structure. They were scenes from sacred and profane history, in the choice of which the poet seems to have been the burgomasters' adviser. It is not unlikely that he was also consulted on the choice of the artists. Those, at least, who were employed were of a school that Vondel approved. Rembrandt was not among them. He did paint a chimney-piece for the burgomasters' room, but the picture was rejected and one by Lievens, portraying the same episode, was preferred. It is thus described by our poetical City Hall guide: "The son of Fabius commands his own father to dismount before the City's honor and dignity. These respect no relationship and demand that he approach reverently. Thus a man honors the State in the office which he holds."

There was a large gallery surrounding the central hall, at the four corners of which eight open spaces, rounded off at the top, were left for decoration by the painters. It was at Vondel's suggestion that the burgomasters decided to have those filled with scenes of the Batavians' revolt against Rome as it is described by Tacitus. Holland's recent history, her rising against the King of Spain and the eighty years' war with the Spanish Empire, was rich in episodes that might have served the purpose. But Vondel, always enamored of allegory, was averse

to the direct method of portrayal. To glorify Holland's triumph over Spain was, indeed, his aim, but it had to be done poetically, not in the manner of the realist who actually paints what he means to represent. William of Orange, called the Silent, challenging the power of the greatest monarchy on earth was, it is true, an heroic figure, but its heroism would acquire poetic glamor if seen, in suggestive obscurity, through the veil of allegorical presentation. Vondel envied the painter who would be given so noble a theme, and he started an epic of the Batavian revolt to vie with his rival of the brush.

Of all the tribes of Germany, says Tacitus, the most famed for valor were the Batavi. Their territory comprised but a small part of the banks of the lower Rhine, consisting chiefly of an island within it, which is now called the Betuwe, in the Dutch province of Gelderland. They were allies of Rome, and were exempt from taxation, but furnished men and arms in support of the Empire. Their chieftains were Julius Paulus and his brother Claudius Civilis, men of royal descent. The older of these, under a false charge of rebellion, was put to death by the Romans and Civilis was sent in irons to Rome to be disposed of by Nero. But Galba released him from his fetters. He returned to his native land, near the mouth of the Rhine, a bitter enemy of Rome, and bided his time to take revenge for his own and his brother's sufferings. He saw his chance when the war between two rival emperors divided the Romans among themselves. By order of Vitellius, the youth of the Batavi were to be forcibly enlisted into his service, so Civilis espoused Vespasianus' cause. It was easy to stir up his countrymen, for their indignation had been

aroused by the avarice and profligacy of Vitellius' officers, who pressed even the aged and infirm into the service to enrich themselves with the price of their discharge. Civilis, under the pretext of a banquet, convened the nobles and the bravest of the nation in a sacred grove, and when he saw that they were warmed with midnight revelry and mirth, he addressed them in fiery language and bound them all, according to barbarian rites, by the oaths and imprecations of their country. Thereupon he made sure of the aid of neighboring tribes, captured with their help a Roman fleet, defeated two legions of Vitellius' forces, successfully besieged the old camp of the Romans, on the Rhine, and gained for himself a name throughout all Germany and Gaul.

It was this story of the first champion of Dutch liberty of whom history has record that Vondel hoped to see portrayed in eight episodes along the Citizens' Gallery and sung by himself in a Virgilian epic of twelve books. Neither the poem nor the full set of pictures were ever completed. Fragments of the abortive epic were incorporated with Vondel's drama of *Batavian Brothers*, which deals with the initial incident of Julius Paulus' execution and Civilis' deportation to Rome. Two short sentences of Tacitus yielded the argument for this historical play. To evolve five acts out of such scanty material was a conjurer's trick, and Vondel carried it off with but small honor to himself. The dialogue seldom implies or suggests any action on the speaker's part, be he Roman or Batavian, and only in the lyrical stanzas of the chorus does the verse break the monotony of the even flow of words with a clear ring that touches the heart. The order for the eight paintings was given to

Govert Flinck, another artist of German birth whom Vondel admired and patronized. But Flinck never did more than the preliminary sketches. He died before the work was yet begun. The Fleming Jacob Jordaens, of Rubens' School, received an order for three of the lunettes, and Rembrandt was chosen to paint the scene of Claudius Civilis' nocturnal meeting with his fellow conspirators at a banquet in the sacred grove. This incident forms no part of the episode that Vondel dramatized in *Batavian Brothers*, but, aware of its picturesque effect, he made Fronto, a captain of the Romans, picture the scene as one that he himself would stage were he a Batavian noble:

"Were I oppressed as they are, and an enemy of Rome, and their equal in rank and noble pedigree, I would, under pretext of a sacrifice to the gods, invite the great and the bravest of the land to a banquet in the sacred grove and—under the moon at midnight, after the carousing, when the wine, mounting to the brain, stirred up courage and strength—remind them of the brave deeds of the Batavian race and of the ancient freedom violated by the power of Rome. . . . How would the Batavian, bent on avenging his shame, attend to those words and, fired by his wrath, raise his head and cry out, 'it is time to free the neck of coercion'. The forest would resound with the oaths and the clashing of swords wherewith the banqueters sealed their conspiracy."

Vondel had composed his mental picture of Batavian life by studying the prints of Antonius Tempesta, a

Florentine artist of the early seventeenth century who made a picture book of the wars between Batavians and Romans, and Fronto in the play describing the conspirators at their carousal is, in this scene at least, little more than an understudy of Tempesta. Rembrandt did not go to the Florentine for ideas and suggestions. He went straight to the source, the fourth book of Tacitus' History, and gave his own conception of the incident. Tempesta's carefully groomed stage puppets, whom Vondel gave a voice too deep and sonorous for their frames, look absurd and childish by the side of the ruffians in whose midst the fierce figure of one-eyed Civilis was enthroned by Rembrandt's fancy. The rebel was proud, says Tacitus, of his maimed eyesight, which made him look like Hannibal and Sertorius, those other great foes of Rome. But Tempesta either overlooked this detail or rejected its realism as an ugly scar on his spick-and-span Batavian hero. In Rembrandt's painting the blind eye adds to the effect of the scene. It was an effect that the official judges, unfortunately, did not admire. The canvass, the largest Rembrandt ever painted, having hung for some time on approval in its destined place, was rejected by the burgo-masters, and promptly confiscated, it would seem, by a fellow artist who had loaned Rembrandt money as an advance on the pay he was to receive for his Claudius Civilis. The central part, showing the banqueters crossing their swords above the table, is all that remains of the large composition, and the National Museum in Stockholm is the proud possessor of the fragment. A German artist, Jurriaen Ovens, filled the space that Rembrandt's failure left open, and saw his picture hon-

ored with an ample fee and a rhymed inscription by Vondel.

It is painful for a Hollander to have to dwell upon this lack of understanding on Vondel's part for the genius of Rembrandt. One would like to imagine them as twin brothers in art so much alike attuned to the thrill of beauty that the lines of the poet and the lines of the painter seemed to obey the same rhythmic cadence. But their natures were not so related. Though both interpreting the genius of Holland, they each spoke a language that seemed unintelligible to the other. They looked at the world with strangely different eyes. To Vondel it was like the pageantry upon the stage, which needs the projected brilliance of foot- and spot-lights to lend glamor to its commonplaceness. Human suffering had to be seen in the lustre of kingship, civic virtue in the spotlight of authority, in order to furnish a theme for tragic or lyrical verse. But the beauty that Rembrandt saw in a creature of God was not the effect of external illumination, but came from the light within, which may shine with greater force in the poor in spirit than in the great and the mighty. No wonder that of the two Vondel was the more popular in their own lifetime. For the crowd can see beauty in the life behind the footlights, but few detect it in the life of every day. Its omnipresence was as little suspected in those days as was the ubiquitousness of the microbe. Only the painters of Holland had discovered it by sheer intuition, but being craftsmen and not theorists, they could not tell the unperceiving what it was they had found except by just painting it. Thus the unlettered seers were the unconscious teachers



not only of the profane crowd but even of the poets, for,  
says Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi,

For, don't you mark? we're made so that  
we love  
First when we see them painted, things we  
have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see.

But it takes a few generations before the artless learn to see through the artist's eyes, and Vondel, visionary though he was, had not sufficiently advanced beyond his time to discover the beautiful at his own door.

As a landscape painter Vondel was, again, of an older school than his brethren of the brush. The landscape had its earliest vogue as a background, and background it remains in Vondel's poetry. But the painters had progressed to a more generous conception of natural scenery. Originally the stage for the scene which the artist wished to represent, the landscape took gradually preëminence over that scene, reducing it to a mere decorative device or accessory to itself, until finally even the accessory faded into nothing and left the landscape bare of all but its own loveliness. The artist did with his own creation as did God with His garden of Eden. He first placed man in possession of the scene, the centre and ruler of an idyllic menagerie, but he ended by driving him out of the garden for being superfluous to nature's beauty. Rembrandt, Hercules Seghers, Jacob van Ruysdael, the greatest of Holland's landscape painters, discovered the grandeur of Nature's solitude.

But in Vondel's eyes to take man out of the landscape would be to rob it of its significance and beauty. Eve fleeing with her mate from the lost garden, in Von-



del's tragedy of *Adam in Exile*, sees "a fire flame up all over Paradise and despoil its trees." Such is Vondel's vision of the landscape unennobled by man's presence. Nature was made for his sake, and without him it would lose its reason for being. He is as essential a part of it as the trees overhead and the ground underfoot. For the artist to paint it as an uninhabited wilderness of vegetation, stone, and water were an act of ingratitude to God and a misunderstanding of His purpose.

This, of course, is a purely literary, as opposed to the pictorial conception of the landscape. The poet's reason, not the eye, appraises its beauty, and the standards by which it is judged are the descriptions of natural scenery in classical literature. Horace's idyllic picture of rural life, in contrast to the townsman's troubles and vexations, is the typical model for the literary landscape of seventeenth century poetry: *Beatus ille qui procul negotiis*, blessed the man who, far from the madding crowd, leads a contented, humble life among hills and rills and the beasts of the field. It is nature thought of as a foil to the folly of cultured city life, a fanciful reminder to civilized man in his sins that he also was once in Arcady.

Sings the chorus in *Palamedes*:

He's blest who in a lovely nook,  
Beside a rustling, silvery brook,  
His cottage builds and rude dwelling.  
That man's indeed a happy king.  
He does not pine for empty praise;  
The property that he surveys  
Is all he needs. His ears drink in  
Of singing birds the merry din,  
When dew-drops that the morning shed  
Have here and there their length outspread

On petals of unfolding roses,  
And earth the fragrances discloses  
And countless colors, to the eye,  
Of pretty flowers whose rainbow dye  
A bridal robe for Iris weaves.

.. . . .  
He tends his growing crops with care,  
Or does with nets the birds ensnare,  
Or leaning over, wide awake,  
Pulls sprawling fishes from the lake  
With bending rod, or if he tire  
Of suchlike sports, he may attire  
His horse in harness ere it dawn  
And chase with hounds the hare and fawn,  
Or by broad daylight ride apace  
'Long country roads that interlace  
Like once the labyrinth of Crete.  
Here blows a kaleyard in its neat  
Enclosure, here a clover field,  
That rows of trees on all sides shield.  
Here do they milk the lowing cow,  
In yonder field they swink and plough,  
And there they're piling up the crops.  
There buckwheat's sown, and yonder hops.  
Here grows and blows the teeming corn  
Hedged all around with prickly thorn.  
There glides a bark across the pond,  
Here smokes a thorp, and far beyond  
A castle dimly holds the view,  
And farther still the mountains blue.  
Far from such life he wandereth  
Whom unrest follows unto death,  
Whom from the morning until eve  
Cares gnaw and plague without reprieve,  
Such cares as rob of peace and health  
A slave unto the Commonwealth,  
Who must promote the general good  
And make of many moods one mood.  
Him envy bites although he be  
A man of faith and honesty.  
The robe lends honor, I confess,  
The cushion dignity and stress,  
But oh, the burden that one heaves!

What trouble nests beneath the eaves  
Where all are eager for to climb  
And vice grows riotous and crime.

This is landscape painting that reminds one of the manner of the mediaeval miniaturists, who decorated books of hours with pictures of man's activities in the consecutive seasons of the year. There is no hint of the mind's communication with Nature. Her beauty does not speak to the poet "rememberable things," it is her fertility that charms his fancy. Not the thrills of emotion, not the silences of solitude, but ease and plenty as the reward of honest toil on the land are the poet's theme. He does not bare to us his mind as it is impressed by the spectacle of earth and sky, he shows us man impressing his mark on the land, tilling it for his use, turning it into a pleasure ground for his leisure hours, making the beasts of the field minister to his wants. And over that scene of pastoral selfishness the sun is for ever shedding his blessing, the rain cloud and the thunder storm appearing only in the reverse of the picture where the foolish city merchant is seen risking his fortune to their mercy.

In a bucolic wedding song of more than thirty years later the lover woos the maiden with an evocation of similar "landscape pictures."<sup>1</sup> The phrase is the lover's but his execution was better than the name he gave it. For the landscape would not have won the beloved, it was the genre picture of himself and her in its idyllic setting that made her yield. Both the matter and the manner are conventional, but it is a convention that leaves play to individual expression. Within the limita-

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<sup>1</sup> *Field Song for the Wedding of Reinier van Estvelt and Rebecka Bruining* (1659).

tions of the type Vondel found room for the transcription of his memories in language unmistakably his own. While following his classical models, Horace, Seneca, Du Bartas, he remembered the self-seen arcadies outside the city walls, the country places *Scheybeeck*, north of Haarlem, of his friend Laurens Baeck, and *Eickhof*, in Het Gooi, of the Hinlopens. There Vondel was a welcome visitor on sunny spring and summer days, when he saw the landscape in its idyllic mood such as he painted it in the *Allegro* just quoted. It gives a faithful picture of the scenery round *Scheybeeck*, if we may take "mountains" as a bold name for Holland's lowly dunes. In that rural peace, in the company of the pretty daughters of the house, Vondel always felt serenely happy, inclined to "jest and youthful jollity, quips and cranks, and wanton wiles." But there is, in Vondel's *œuvre*, no *Penseroso* companion piece to the *Scheybeeck* idyll. He was insensible to the pleasures of melancholy, and saw no loveliness in the scenery that evoked it. The poetry of that mood, in seventeenth century Holland, was written only by her painters, most eloquently by Jacob van Ruysdael, whose pictures are the truest rendering in line and color of Milton's lyric.

There is, it is true, a passage in *Lucifer* that paints a landscape of wild, awe-inspiring beauty. Uriel, giving his account of the archangel's defeat by Michael's hosts, compares the victors precipitating themselves upon their yielding enemies with

An inland sea or northern waterfall  
Which, rushing from the rocks, thunders and roars  
That beast and monster dread in deep-sunk dales,  
Where stones, hurled from the steep, and gushing spirts,

And firs innumerable fell and crush  
All that withstands not the fierce violence  
Of torrent, tree, and stone.

But this is not landscape painted for its own dear sake. It is the action of the torrent, not the wild grandeur of the scenery, that is described. The picture is an emblem of destructive force, which, if it frightens beasts and monsters, cannot be beautiful to man. Vondel must have had in mind some picture of Scandinavian mountain scenery by Allart van Everdingen, but he transcribed the original with different feelings from those with which the artist painted it. To the poet the landscape was a means, to the painter an end.

Not destruction but growth, not violence but loveliness, the lush and lusty grass, the dew that sparkles in the sun, the babbling brook, the fruit-bearing orchard, the merry woodnotes wild, the lambs agamboling in the meadow, and in the centre of that happy scene the swain and his sweetheart in chaste embrace, that seemed to Vondel a vision worth painting. The scenery at *Scheybeeck* was an earnest of the reality revealed in God's own book of Genesis. When in *Adam in Exile* he pictures the garden, colorful words and melodious rhythms spring from the soil of his language as spontaneously as do the flowers and the brooks from its sacred ground. The air is fragrant with the scent of lilies and roses, the banks of the rivers sparkle with the brilliancy of many jewels, the ground is a carpet of flowers, the birds wing their colors through the verdure, the unicorn stands mirrored at the pool. In that enchanted scene Adam and Eve, with their attendant angels, perform the wedding dance, he the sun,

she the moon, the angels the planets, all moving with celestial grace. After their transgression the song of birds and angels ceases, a mist enfolds the garden, a tempest rises and shakes the shivering foliage, trees are felled, the earth shudders, lightning gashes the darkness, the thunder rolls above the dying day, and the sinners, fleeing from the scene of their transgression, see behind them the Paradise ablaze, the burning trees their fatal wedding torches. The triumph of sin and sickness and death over life made the story of *Adam in Exile* the tragedy of tragedies.

The tragic landscape is here painted for a moral lesson. To paint it merely for aesthetic enjoyment would never have occurred to Vondel. The sombre beauty of a cemetery whose sepulchres in ruin are, in Goethe's phrase, tombs of themselves, was not yet realized as beauty by the poet who, steeped in the classical literature of Greece and Rome, shared the aversion of the ancients to the contemplation of death and decay. John Evelyn, visiting Amsterdam in 1641, made from there an excursion, he tells us, "to a place without the town, called Ouerkirk, where the Jews have a spacious field assigned them to bury their dead, full of sepulchres with Hebraic inscriptions, some of them stately and costly. Looking through one of these monuments, where the stones were disjointed, I perceived divers books and prayers lie about a corpse; for it seems, when any learned Rabbi dies, they bury some of his books with him. With the help of a stick, I raked out several written in the Hebrew characters, but much impaired." That same cemetery was painted by Ruysdael, who sensed and interpreted its romantic gloom.

The Englishman's antiquarian curiosity and the painter's instinct for beauty brought them together where the poet had no inducement to follow them. The paraphernalia of death were repellent to him, as futile attributes of decay. It was the soul that mattered, and the phenomenon of death was its blessed escape from the prison, "the flesh that must decay beneath the sod." To take an interest in that vile part and think of death otherwise than as the door to life was, to Vondel, unaesthetic. Life in action, life as an earnest of the better life hereafter, was beautiful and an inspiration to song. But the livid corpse of Rembrandt's *Lesson in Anatomy*, the crumbling ruins of a noble castle, the gloomy cemetery with its gaping tombs he left to the admiration of morbid painters. He sang in a triumphant hymn the beauty of the new *Stadthuis*, a monument that would defy destructive time; it was Rembrandt who preserved for us a drawing of the ruins that remained, after the fire, of the old City Hall.



## IX.

### THE LAST ACT

The born Amsterdammer will tell you that his city is a healthy place to live in, and he will prove his claim with its low bill of mortality. The sceptic's answer to that argument is that no one in bad health can endure its bad climate and flees the infectious atmosphere to recover or die elsewhere. Modern sanitation has done much to improve living conditions in Amsterdam, and may, in spite of the sceptics, claim credit for its present low death rate. But in the seventeenth century it certainly was no health resort. Built on a soggy soil from which the water was drained into a network of stagnant canals that, on warm days, infested the air with their bad odor, it must have been a breeding place of contagion and disease. The streets were narrow, and the houses in the more populous quarters were dark and insufficiently ventilated. Of the water supply James Howell wrote in 1619:

"They have neither Well or Fountain or any spring of fresh Water, in or about all this city but their fresh Water is brought to them by Boats; besides, they have Cisterns to receive the Rain-water, which they much use."

The people's love of cleanliness, the women's incessant scrubbing of floors and pavements, and the neatness with

which they kept their houses in good repair, offset, it is true, the dangers of infection. "His chambers are but several sandboxes," says an anonymous English writer of the period, "and there you must either go out to spit, or blush when you see the Mop brought."<sup>1</sup> The British envoy, Sir William Temple, tells an anecdote against himself that confirms the truth of this remark. "Dining one day at Monsieur Hoefft's, and having a great cold, I observed, every time I spit, a tight handsome wench (that stood in the room with a clean cloth in her hand) was presently down to wipe it up, and rub the board clean: somebody at table speaking of my cold, I said, the most trouble it gave me was to see the poor wench take so much pain about it: Monsieur Hoefft told me, 'T was well I escaped so, and, that if his wife had been at home, though I were an ambassador, she would have turned me out of doors for fouling her house." Feminine instinct insisted in Holland on cleanliness such as even the British aristocracy did not yet observe in their homes. Still, in spite of the women's enforcement of an experimental hygiene, life in Amsterdam remained a risky business, and we of the twentieth century, who have learnt to guard ourselves against an invisible host of microbes and germs, can not but wonder how anyone, in those unsuspecting, happy-go-lucky days of little sanitation and less pathology, could defy all the curses that flesh is heir to and live to a lusty old age.

Vondel seems to have led a charmed life immune from contagion and disease. Several times the city was visited by pestilence, in the years 1663 and 1664 by so severe an outbreak that 24000 people, more than one-tenth

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<sup>1</sup> The Dutch drawn to the Life, p. 68.

of the city's population, were buried in 1663 and in the summer of the following year the weekly mortality reached an average of 900. His daughter-in-law and a grandson were among the dead, but Vondel remained untouched to survive them by more than fourteen years. Apart from the mental affliction that sunk him, in his early manhood, into despondency and melancholy, he suffered from no serious illness that we know of. He even seems to have gained in health as he grew older, as if each added year that brought him nearer to death taught him better how to live. His face, says Brandt, was, in the prime of his manhood, whitish pale and thin, but in his old age it was broad and fleshy, and of a ruddy complexion. He mellowed slowly into old age, even as his talent had slowly ripened to its fullness. Both his life and his poetic growth partook of the dignity that goes with staid and measured movement.

With that physical vigor went a vigor of mind which bore up under sorrow as valiantly as the body carried its burden of years. It was not the death of his dear ones that bowed him down. They were among the blessed in the heavenly paradise, to be envied, not to be deplored. In the stanza that Tennyson used for *In Memoriam* he wrote a beautiful elegy on the death of Dionys, a son of his friend Gerard Vossius, consoling the father with the reflection that we have reason to mourn when the balsam is spilt because of the loss of the precious scent; but that there is none when only the glass is broken and the noble liquid saved. That grief over balsam shed was his. He mourned a soul whose fragrance had been spilt, while the vessel which contained it was unbroken. His only living son, the

child whom he had given his own name, had become a soulless body, an empty keel that had shed its noble cargo before it reached the harbor for which it was bound.

In evaluating the dramatic possibilities in the Biblical story of Jephthah, Vondel had found in it the true matter of a tragedy, because "the conflict was not merely between common friends or distant relatives, but between the nearest blood relations, father, mother and daughter, an only daughter." In a tragic conflict of that nature the poet became himself an actor. Joost the Younger had not inherited his father's talent. He only succeeded to the business, and the business succeeded very indifferently since he became the old man's partner. Vondel's annual account with the Bank of Amsterdam, in the early 'forties, amounted to an average of 40,000 guilders (\$16,000). But in the following years it rapidly decreased, and after 1652, the year in which the son, it seems, became solely responsible for the firm, the name Vondel no longer occurs in the account books of the Bank. He was, evidently, as incapable of managing the business as he was unable to manage his matrimonial affairs, and when he publicly failed as a merchant his bankruptcy involved his domestic ruin.

He was married twice and had three children, two boys and a girl, of his first union, and a son, called Joost, by Baertje Hooft, his second wife. The latter belonged to a Catholic branch of the Hooft family and was a distant cousin of the Sheriff of Muiden. The old poet was, evidently, fond at first of his new daughter-in-law, and probably not a little proud that his son had married a beautiful wife with distinguished con-

nections. In 1651, the year in which his little namesake was born, he wrote a poem in praise of her bust in colored wax, "an image that reveals the soul and by its beauty shows what difference there is between man and man. How well goes with that swanlike neck the golden chain from which the sacred diamond cross depends upon the tender alabaster of her pure breast, white like the snow of winter!" If the life-like copy could elicit from the old man such glowing praise, he must have been fond of the living model. But in the following year the young couple had, apparently, become estranged from Vondel senior. At the home of his mother-in-law at Weesp, a little town south of Amsterdam, Joost made his last will on February 16, 1652, the first birthday of their son, and under it he instituted, in the event of his death, not his father but his wife's grandfather one of two guardians over the children of his former marriage, the other being a Catholic merchant of good standing in Amsterdam. Joost and Baertje, with the four children, had lived under their father's roof in the Warmoesstraat, he had shared their home life, and they had called their first born after him, still he was not trusted with the guardianship and saw a stranger, who was no relation of the children, preferred to himself. It cannot have been on account of his age that he was excluded, for Baertje's grandfather can scarcely have been a younger man. Only the assumption of an estrangement between father and son can explain the latter's action, and Vondel's subsequent departure from the old house where he had lived all his life gives color to that supposition. He moved, in 1653, with his daughter Anna to a house

on the *Prinsengracht*, leaving Joost, with his family, in sole possession of the house and, it would seem, of the business. The two clasped hands in the sign above the door may still have claimed for the business the customer's trust. But the unclasping of hands by the partners was a symbolic act that proved a prophecy more true than the emblem on the signboard. For as a merchant Joost the Younger was evidently a failure. In December 1654 he changed his trade for the broker's profession, but in that he failed even more ignominiously. In November 1656, Vondel's son and namesake was a bankrupt. If the custom had put faith in the new manager at the sign of the Trust, he sadly belied it. Nor did the faith that bound Baertje to her husband stand the strain of his financial failure. She filed a suit for a separation and authorized a certain Hillebrand Sobbe to collect all debts that were due to her. A deposition made before a notary in 1657 describes Joost the Younger insulting and threatening this man on two occasions. He met Sobbe one day at a vintner's and, seizing him by his cloak, yelled at him in his rage, "Rogue, thief, scoundrel, I have got my knife ready for you, I will get you yet!" and a week later he called at Sobbe's house and said, "Will you come with me to my father?" But Sobbe refused: "I thought that your father would come here." Whereupon Joost, again in a fit of rage, "My father is too good and too honest to call on such a rogue as you," accusing him, in the same breath, of intimate relations with Baertje. "Joost," asked Sobbe quietly, "did you say on the Exchange that you had your knife ready for me?" "That I did, and you will feel it yet!"



The father's passionate nature that found a vent in noble poetry was, in the son, debased into an ugly temper uncontrolled by any sense of decorum or shame. The loss of all that must have been precious to him, his reputation as a merchant, his father's love, his wife's affection, did not arrest him on his downward course. Baertje must bear part, the larger part perhaps, of the blame for his downfall. She was a spendthrift and, by constantly nagging for money and still more money, may have driven Joost to risky speculations that became his undoing. Her conduct in the days of his distress was not that of a loving helpmate. By giving him ground for the suspicion that she was playing him foul with another man she drove him to exasperation. But his own behavior, after they had drifted apart, did not redeem his past record. The "Register of all the names of the Brokers, from 1612 to 1661" has it that "Joost van den Vondel, broker since December 5, 1654, sailed for the East Indies in December 1659." Brandt supplies a comment to that entry in these words, "The poet's friends sought to induce the son to sail for Java. But he would not hear of it, so that the father, at last, saw himself compelled, together with his friends, to request the burgomasters that he might be sent there by force, which was granted at once. He sailed, but died on the voyage." A French traveler, M. de Parival, has called the Dutch East Indies of those days "the very necessary purgatory of these United Provinces," and the German Benthem described them more graphically as "the dumping ground for Holland's filth." As a piece of dirty refuse Joost was shoved on board an East-Indiaman to be shaken out on the garbage heap of human offal in



Java. He must have been guilty of worse than extravagance and dissipation. The dispatch to the Indies was, doubtless, an escape from deeper disgrace: a public trial and a jail sentence. To spare the father that ignominy the burgomasters hastened to comply with his request, and fate added its mercy to theirs by granting the prodigal, instead of a deathbed on the garbage heap, a sailor's burial at sea.

"If I had not the psalms to console me, I should perish in my grief," Vondel said at the time of Joost's financial failure and divorce. When by his conduct and by charges of misconduct against his wife the son brought his name into disrepute, the father published *King David's Harp Songs*, a rendering of the psalter that no Dutch poet after him has ever surpassed. In the invocation of the psalmist to God the poet laid the fervor of his own appeal for light in his darkness. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, the health of my countenance." But no direct allusion to his own tragedy can be found in his verse. Grief that lay too deep for tears lay too deep for words. Its only speech was silence. When the rake's progress had ended and the son's presence, dear to him in spite of all that he had made him suffer, was lost to him for good, the agony of his soul broke out in the cry of anguish with which David in *King David Restored* (1660) bewails Absalom's death. "O father without son, the glory of my realm! Where liest thou, Absalom? Where lieth that beautiful corpse? Where else but in the father's heart? There lieth my Absalom. Thou shalt not lack a funeral, my son, my dearest fruit. Thy father's

heart is the grave, where thou liest buried . . . . Take away my harp. Hang it for ever on the wall. O, Absalom, my son, must I lose thee for ever? O, Absalom, would to God that I might have died for thee!"

But God willed it otherwise. The father lived on to restore the ruin that Joost had left behind. He did his utmost to save the son's name, which was his own, from foul dishonor. He made himself responsible for the payment of the young man's debts and for the restitution of the moneys that others had entrusted to the bankrupt broker. He journeyed, at seventy, to Denmark, to collect considerable sums that were due to Joost the Younger from Copenhagen business men. Vondel had been there on business before, in 1628, when his silk store was prospering and the Amsterdam merchant was a man of greater importance abroad than the poet of *Palamedes*. He met with a different reception thirty years later. As a great poet he was welcomed and honored by men of influence at the royal court, but the business world does not seem to have given him much consideration. On his return to Amsterdam, at any rate, the injured parties, disappointed of their hope that the journey to Denmark would bring them redress, threatened to institute law proceedings, expecting, perhaps, that Anna, to save her father further worries, would surrender her maternal portion. But Vondel, at the age of seventy, had still the vigor and the will power to earn the money that he owed. Through the influence of a burgomaster's wife who was known as an admirer of his poetry, he obtained an appointment as clerk in the City *Lombard*, an institution that lent money upon pawns at a moderate interest. The salary of 650 guilders a

year (\$260) was considerable as salaries went in those days. A minister of the gospel could scarcely count on more, nor did the headmaster of a Latin grammar school receive a higher pay. Vondel's desk was in the Directors' room, where he kept the big ledger, not down in the office where the people brought in their pawns. His instruction prescribed that he must "be in attendance, with head uncovered, on the gentlemen who on behalf of the City exercise authority and supervision." He will not have resented that as an insult to his dignity. If the gentlemen had arrogated to themselves authority and supervision over his poetry, he would have scorned their presumption. As their clerk he was willing to accept the social implications of the office and waive the respect that the poet might claim. It was harder for him to repress as the gentlemen's clerk the poet's promptings, to fix his mind on the registering of pawns while it was passionately longing to take wing. For ten long years he resumed, day after day, that bitter conflict between duty and desire, but duty had an ally in the knowledge that the money its performance earned was saving the Vondel name from dishonor. At the end of those ten years, and of a long life of eighty, he handed in his resignation; and the burgomasters, in accepting it, let him retain his full salary for the few years that he was likely yet to live. They were anxious, no doubt, to honor the man no less than the poet. For his own life had been a true poem, and the decade then concluded not its least noble part.

On June 28, 1673, when he was in his eighty-fifth year, the poet made a deposition before a notary concerning the state of his finances. He did not possess any

estate or capital, he said, since the capital and estate he had formerly owned had all been consumed in discharging his son's debts and in fulfilling the obligations he incurred when standing security for him. He had not yet been able to restore all that he owed, although he had spent not only all of his *Lombard* salary that he did not need for his keep, but also the proceeds from the sale of his furniture, books, papers, and manuscripts, which he had made over under contract to his daughter Anna, he paying her for his board and lodging out of the amount he retained from his stipend. And she had promised him that when he died, with the proceeds from the sale of his clothes and with what there should be left of his wages, she would pay for a decent funeral.

The statement needs no comment. It is eloquent by its very simplicity. The old man had become dependent upon his daughter, living under her roof, paying for his meals at her board, reading the books that had been his and were now hers. Even the stipend which he went on drawing after his release from the *Lombard* was not his own, for the part that was not needed for his daily wants had been signed away in advance to satisfy the creditors. His very poetry in manuscript was, after April 30, 1665, the date of the transfer of all his possessions to Anna, no longer his own property. They were, it is true, much safer in her keeping. Her possessions could not be attached. She would treasure the things that he valued. His books would be on their accustomed shelves, each in its place and ready to his hand. If his eyesight should fail him, the authors that he loved would still commune with him in Anna's voice. It would echo his own from the manuscripts in her

possession, when the poet should have become too old to add another verse to his last line. He himself was hers, with all that he had once possessed. And if an old man must be owned, as a child is owned by his mother, his second childhood had best be in a daughter's keeping.

But although, when approaching his eightieth year, he was a dependent in the legal sense of the word, neither physically nor mentally was he yet in need of support. During the ten years of his confinement in the Directors' room at the *Lombard* he made the freedom of his evening hours yield a rich harvest of lyric, dramatic, and didactic verse. Plays that he had begun and left unfinished long ago were rescued from the bottom of the drawer and made ready for the printer. It was as if the loss of his worldly affluence made him more thrifty in husbanding the capital that his mind had yielded. *King Oedipus*, translated from the Greek of Sophocles, *David in Exile*, *David Restored*, and *Samson*, were published in 1660, *Adonias* in 1661, *Batavian Brothers* and *Phaeton* in 1663, *Adam in Exile* in 1664, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, after Euripides, in 1666, *Noah* and *Zungchin* in 1667, Euripides' *Theban Brothers* and Sophocles' *Trachinian Maidens* in 1668. And that was not all. The works of Virgil, this time in Alexandrian verse, appeared in 1660, and the two following years brought a couple of long didactic poems, *Meditations on God and Religion* and *The Glory of the Church*, together with an epic in six cantos, *John the Baptist*. He evidently worked in feverish tension, anxious to complete the fragmentary conceptions taking shape in his mind or preserved on paper, before the day should come when

thought would be inarticulate. It was not the Grub-street industry of the beggared poet that spurred him on. The praise of his verse was his only profit. There was royalty in his lavish gift of poetry to the nation, there was none from the sale of his books or the production of his plays. The proceeds from the theatre went to the upkeep of two municipal houses of charity, and Vondel would have felt guilty of robbing the city's orphans and old men if he had claimed his part of their income. After his death a change of opinion set in as to the propriety of accepting stage royalties. The Poets' Society *Nil Volentibus Arduum*, which had received Vondel's blessing at its birth in 1669, declared in 1681 that the members "would not cede any plays to the theatre unless a certain percentage of the proceeds were paid them for each piece." But they carried their point not without protest. The Rotterdam poet Joan Dullaart, having heard of their presumption, wrote indignantly to a friend that "The Trustees of both the Orphanage and the Old Men's Home should oppose the cursed greed of these arrogant men and deny their unreasonable demand." The little that Vondel earned by the writing of poetry was paid him for the kind of verse that he himself valued least, rhymes made to order for all sorts of occasions, births, weddings, and deaths in the homes of the rich. During the first few years following the son's catastrophe he produced an unusually large crop of these trivialities for home consumption, elegies, epithalamiums, inscriptions to portraits, lines in praise of, verses to the memory of, some grand and forgotten nonentity. They were not to be despised, those orders, for the vocal share that he took in the



sorrow, the mirth, and the vanity of strangers helped to relieve the burden of the dead one whom he had buried in his heart. Sometimes a bigger reward came his way, when the burgomasters offered the city's hospitality to a royal guest and wanted his praises sung as lavishly as they drank his health in their rummers. In 1659, a Princess of Orange was married at The Hague to the Prince of Anhalt-Dessau, and the young couple, with the mother of the bride, visited Amsterdam in August at the invitation of the city's rulers; in 1662 the Elector of Cologne, in 1667 Cosmo de Medici, received a sumptuous welcome from the city. At each event Vondel, like a leader of the chorus in his tragedies, interpreted the feelings of the citizenship.

Nor did his mind dwell exclusively within the narrow limits of the city. Amsterdam, thanks to its widely ramified commercial relations, was a great staple of news, and Vondel still followed with keen interest the foreign events that appeared to him to be shaping European history. The coronation of the Emperor Leopold in 1658, "the young sun whose rising overcame the night that seemed to menace Europe when the old sun had set," the victory of the Dutch fleet over the Swedes under Wrangel, by which free passage through the Sound was maintained, the fortunate Restoration in England, were fit occasions for lyrical effusion. The end of the hated Protectorate gave the old foe of the Puritans hope of a better world. He saw Amsterdam and London united and their prosperity grow in the mild clime of peace. Impulsive as ever, and easily impressed by the fair feature of the moment, he took



promises and protestations as an earnest of fulfillment, and tuned the music of his verse to the measure of his elation. Charles II, as the son of a martyred king and the enemy of Cromwell, appeared to his fancy as an aureoled saint and a champion of right and justice. In the flare of war, the second naval contest by which soon afterwards the two rival maritime powers measured their strength, he saw his hero's nimbus fade, but he still refused to blame him for the shattering of his hopes. The war was not of his making but the work of regicidal London. A year later, however, in an ode on De Ruyter's victory over the British fleet under Monk, he faced the facts and recognized in the champion of right and justice no better than a pirate of the sea.

Through this disturbance of the peace in the North Sea Vondel saw the future of entire Europe jeopardized. In the year of the Restoration he had flattered himself with a vision of Great Britain dictating to the Turk, the scourge of Christendom. "The turban fears the realm that long ago dared water its horses along the Nile and the Red Sea," he wrote, taking pleasure in a fanciful picture of Charles II as another Richard Coeur de Lion, a bold crusader against the menace of the Crescent. What a divided Europe had to fear from the Turks could be learnt from China, "the Europe of Asia," where the invading hordes had spread terror and destruction after the Emperor Zungchin had hung himself in despair over the disruption of his realm:

Yet Christendom, unworth the name,  
Learns not from China's loss,  
Nor do they save, their God to shame,

The honor of the Cross,  
And in His need refresh the Lord  
With vinegar and gall,  
And let before the invading horde  
The Cross's frontier fall,  
While ancient Crete, in days of yore  
For hundred cities famed,  
Is massacred in blood and gore.  
The Danube, bare and lamed,  
Calls "Help!", invokes a Scander Bey,  
A later day Martel,  
To dare the Saracen's array  
And drive them into hell.  
But Christian ears are stopped and deaf,  
And politics of state  
Will whet the sword, that Unbelief,  
Accursed Mohammed's hate,  
May hold the field. Who dare condone  
Such crime? But Christendom  
Stirs not, though frontier guards, alone,  
Cry, "Help! The Turk is come!"  
Thus heartened will the Turk apace  
Through Europe burn his trail,  
And drive the wreckage of her race  
To market, slaves for sale,  
Like cattle bleating piteously.  
Then will they, all too late,  
Look back for aid and remedy!  
Who can escape that fate?

This Turkish menace was an obsession with Vondel.  
The European nations should sink all their dogmatic

quarrels in their common belief in Jesus Christ, and show a united front to the infidels. The ideal of Grotius, a universal Christian creed, was Europe's only salvation. Vondel repeated and expanded Grotius' arguments in his *Meditations on God and Religion*, which appeared in 1662, and in the following year he published *The Glory of the Church, its Beginning, Rise and Progress*, which he dedicated to Pope Alexander VII, a history of the Church of Rome from its origin down to the year 1000. A knowledge of Christianity's early history could not fail to convince his readers, he thought, of the truth and purity in which the Church of Rome had maintained it. Those who had strayed from the fold had lost their way in the darkness of their ignorance. They only needed the light of knowledge to find their way back. "Illumine them, O Lord, who wander from the light of the Fathers and hate the oneness of the Church and its Community. Restore them to the style of truth who stray so far from the mount on which Thou art seated, guarding the human race in safety. Convert them who mislead themselves and Thy flock, and who tear them, against reason, from the bosom of the Mother. Collect Thy scattered ones from east and west, that, gathered in one fold, they become accustomed to one shepherd, and to hearing and recognizing His voice."

In order to impress upon his fellow citizens the fate that continued discord would bring over Europe, Vondel dramatized, in 1667, the incidents in China that led up to the suicide of Zungchin and the invasion of the Tartars. The play was at the same time a tribute to the Society of Jesus whose missionaries had won a favor-

ite position under *Zungchin* and saw their achievement involved in his fall. Their spokesman in the drama, Adam Schall, was, like Vondel, a native of Cologne, and his junior by only four years, so that it is not unlikely that the poet honored in his hero an acquaintance of his early childhood. In spite of this personal touch, the play is one of the weakest of Vondel's whole dramatic oeuvre. The writing of it was a work of piety, not of inspiration. Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico Historia* and A. Kircher's *Sina Illustrata* were the sources from which he drew his plot, but he read them with a scholar's interest, not with that childlike surrender to the story's beauty which was the spirit in which he approached the Scriptures. The Bible stories had been with him all his life, from the days when he heard them read in his mother's voice; they were part of him for he had lived them himself, he had been an actor in them in the day dreams of his youth. Their dramatization was the visualizing of scenes that were intensely real to his fancy. But the Chinese of *Zungchin*, in spite of his conscientious study of Martini and Kircher, remained soulless puppets which he had not the showman's skill to manipulate so dexterously as to make them seem real and alive.

Shortly before *Zungchin* saw the light, a young poet, Antonides van der Goes, published a drama that had the same story of China's conquest by the Manchu Tartars for its subject. Vondel read it with pleasure and approval, and went to pay a visit to Antonides. This call was the beginning of a friendship between the two men which cheered the old poet's declining years. There was a difference of two generations between Vondel and

Antonides, but pleasure on the one side in encouraging and stimulating promising youth and admiration on the other for the prince of poets built a bridge across the gap of sixty years. Vondel had become a lonely man. He had survived nearly all his contemporaries, and a younger generation had grown up which was more sure of its own excellence than of his greatness. These younger poets of Amsterdam had founded a literary society which they sanguinely called *Nil Volentibus Arduum*, nothing is difficult for those who will. Talent, of course, was a necessary requirement, for they were neo-classicists like Vondel and believed with him that the poet can not be made but must be born. But nature having been propitious, nothing could hinder her favorite from climbing to the top of Parnassus if he only made up his mind to get there. Diligent application to the laws of poetry and tireless practice in the art would secure him success, and to relieve the hardships of the clamber he should rope himself to other aspiring mountaineers, and join the party of *Nil*. Criticism of each other's endeavors, joint emendation of an approved poem to the verge of flawlessness, and the issuance of the members' effusions under their collective auspices were the tugs on the rope by which they were to be pulled to the summit.

There was nothing in this programme to which Vondel could not subscribe. In concluding his *Introduction to Dutch Poetry*, of 1650, he had made a plea for just such a collaboration of the poets' craft. "It were to be wished that choice spirits, under the auspices of learned Maecenates, would sometimes discuss these matters and found something like a New Parnassus, after the manner of Italy, where, without envy and impartially, each one's

old and new poems could be tested, so as not only to strive for beauty and effect, but also to avoid, out of a noble ambition, our mistakes, and thereby to give to Dutch poetry its full splendor." He was glad, therefore, to sponsor the birth of *Nil Volentibus Arduum* in 1669 with a few lines in praise of a translation of Quinault's *Agrippe*, the first publication with which *Nil* appeared in the open.

Antonides was among its founders. But he soon left the comradeship of men who proved better carpers than harpers. In a pamphlet of the period *Nil* is described as "a poetical inquisition . . . which curses and rejects everything that does not conform to the Canon." They even presumed to criticize Vondel by insinuation, having gained audacity by a successful début that Vondel himself had acclaimed. "It has never been correctly understood," wrote one of them, "what are the requirements of a good tragedy; what the purpose of the chorus; how much beauty there is in the unities of action, time, and place; how and where the knot must be tied and again untied; how one scene must link on to the next; why four speakers are not approved in one and the same dialogue; why no personage may enter unless called or expected; and other matters never or very seldom observed as they should be by the best of poets . . . Indeed, what should we know about the art of the stage, if it were not for France's great achievement, since the Cardinal De Richelieu so lavishly showed his favor to the lovers of the art, . . . and Corneille, that stage sun, showed us how to write tragedies?"

Antonides bitterly resented this mean attack by implication upon Vondel. The old poet had generously



praised his immature verse, and here came an upstart, of his own age, and dared ungenerously insinuate that Vondel was a failure as a playwright. It was untrue, but even if it had been true, reverence and a sense of his own insignificance should have restrained the writer. Antonides felt that he owed it to his own generation to disavow the man. He chastized him with the only weapon that could smart such thick-skinned impertinence; he ridiculed him in a satire that retold the ancient story of graceless Marsyas who thought he excelled Apollo on the flute.

To throw Vondel from the pedestal and raise the statue of Corneille in his stead was not only an act of gross injustice, it betrayed the iconoclast's lack of critical acumen. For instead of making the two poets change places he should have joined them in brotherly embrace, fellow fighters for the same ideal. That which Corneille accomplished Vondel had before him accomplished for Dutch drama. The evolution of French poetry from the artificial manner of the Pleiade to the direct and simple style of Malherbe and Corneille was repeated by Vondel in his own poetic growth. In his early verse he strove for beauty by a preciousness of diction that seems to echo Ronsard. Hooft and Huygens set the fashion, and Vondel, not yet sure of his way, followed their lead. But like Malherbe, though independent of him, he turned from the mannerisms of a poetic caste to the clear and simple speech of the people, warning against the use of a Dutch style "too much latinized, or too precious, or newfangled." The inversion of the natural word order, he said, should be avoided like the plague, for as soon as that is infringed, the language loses its



lustre, and our ear the delight of its music. Those torturers of the tongue should listen to the old Dutch folk songs, which had a natural ease, melodiousness, and graceful movement. The most ancient and the best poets were the most natural and the simplest. It is the lesser poet who aims at obscurity and wishes not to understand himself, that he may pass for a profound man and wise. In the beautiful intricacies of John Donne's verse, which tempted Huygens to test his ingenuity by a translation, Vondel could not see the beauty for the darkness, and in a pretty poem he gently chaffed Maria Tesselschade for admiring their obscurity:

See Britain's Donne!  
"Dark sun that shone  
For few who could descry it,"  
Says Huygens. Who'd deny it?

For Huygens knows what's exquisite,  
Knows caviar, and relishes it,  
Tobacco too, and smokes it,  
Which fumes the brain and chokes it.

But this 's the rarest of the rare,  
A delicacy for Mijnheer  
The Sheriff at the Castle<sup>1</sup>  
And for our dearest Tessel.  
O charming nymph, o lovely Tess,  
Don't ye understand it? Do but guess,  
Or ask for an expounder,  
For these are songs profounder

---

<sup>1</sup> The poet P. C. Hooft, Sheriff of Muiden.

Than Solomon's Song of Songs profound,  
 Whose meaning ne'er a man has found  
 But learning-pickled Smoutius <sup>(1)</sup>  
 And suchlike learned vouchers.

But why should I disdain a treat  
 That mustard is to Mostaert's meat? <sup>(2)</sup>  
 He swears, "The dainty's perfit  
 And never gives a surfeit!"

Now friends, go to and eat your fill,  
 Add vinegar and piccalill.  
 I grudge you not the flavor.  
 It's not the stuff I savor.

He did not spare himself the criticism that he thus ironically applied to others. In re-editing, in later days, the works of his exuberant youth, he chastened the diction like a severe and painstaking censor. A new edition of his *Palamedes* appeared in 1652, in which, according to the rules he had laid down in the *Introduction to Dutch Poetry*, he had made numerous changes for the sake of simplicity, ease, and clearness. By his criticism, by his teaching, and most persuasively by his own example he had freed the literary style of Holland from the early mannerisms that did not adorn but encumber it. He had enriched the language by stripping it of the superfluous, he had bared it of all that usage did not consecrate, and had revealed the sinewy

<sup>1</sup> The Reverend Smout was the poet of some songs in which he paraphrased and explained the spiritual meaning of the Song of Songs in shockingly sensual language.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Mostaert, secretary to the burgomasters.

grace of its natural beauty. And in that simple, clear, and noble language he had written dramas that are of a school, though not, indeed, on a par, with those of Corneille. The French poet reveals a knowledge of human character such as Vondel lacked, he has a sense for the stage more subtle and more alive to its possibilities than Vondel, but the latter, with less dramatic talent, developed Dutch drama along the lines that were followed by Corneille. To ignore his work as if Dutch literature would, without it, still have been what it was when *Nil Volentibus Arduum* came to the fore, was to write history stripped of its heroes. Its worship of Corneille would have seemed more sincere if it had not been coupled with disregard of Vondel. Critics who were or pretended to be blind to the greatness of their own predecessor laid themselves open to the suspicion of being unable to measure the real greatness of his French contemporary. Andries Pels, who was the chief lawgiver among them, changed, after Vondel's death, his manner of attack from insinuating silence to specific faultfinding. Vondel had abused the stage by making it a platform for political controversy when he wrote *Palamedes* and *Mary Stuart*, he had taught perverse religion from behind the footlights by distinctly Roman Catholic scenes in *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* and in *Virgins*, he had done worse even when, in his arrogance, he had presumed to penetrate into God's counsel, the mystery of mysteries, and to make an entertaining spectacle of that which happened before the beginning of time. Pels did not hesitate, he explained, to point out these faults in Vondel's drama, since their exposure would aid others in avoiding them.

For "a sailor's surest beacon is the wreck on the beach." He must have badly focused his critical telescope if it showed him in perspective Vondel's noble galleon run aground. His own flat-bottomed tug has long since foundered in the waters of oblivion, but Vondel's ship runs on, the breath of a nation's applause swelling her sails.

But the dicta of *Nil* were not a law to all the younger generation of Amsterdam. A small group of friends and admirers remained faithful to the old poet and brightened with their visits the dullness of his declining years. Antonides, Gerard Brandt, Philip de Koninck, the artist, the two sons of his late friend Gijsbert Plemp, Johan de Wolff, a son of his sister Clementia, were regular callers at his house. Antonides read to him his verse and discussed with him the future of Dutch poetry, Brandt made him talk about the past and gathered in those conversations the data for the biography he was to write, De Koninck drew his portrait as, old and cold, he sat by the fire, a stooping figure wrapped in a dressing gown, the hands hanging down between the knees with a gesture of utter exhaustion. Johan de Wolff had him to dinner every Friday, and when, after his death, his widow, Agnes Block, remarried, she and her husband continued the weekly entertainment. Two grandchildren, a son and a daughter of Joost the Younger by his former marriage, were his daily companions, and to them he gave the love that his lost prodigal, in spite of all, never exhausted. They were a delicate pair, consumptive children who, probably, bore in their frames the diseased inheritance of a dissipated father. On March 30, of the year 1668, the two made their last will and

testament at their grandfather's house, Maria, then twenty years old, lying sick in bed. The frail girl prepared herself for death while the grandfather, still hale and hearty in his eightieth year, sat at her bedside with his friend and contemporary Dirck van Ryswyck, a famous silversmith and jeweler, who was present as a witness. She did not live to see another year: in the week before Christmas Vondel buried his grandchild in the New Church on the *Dam*.

He mourned her, deeply feeling his loss, yet thankful for her escape from mortal sufferings to a better life. Humility and patience were the pinions that winged her thither, he wrote, remembering a passage in Thomas à Kempis, in whose words he must have looked for consolation in his grief. Never did he write an elegy more beautiful than the tender stanzas with which he said farewell to her departed soul. Not striving for dignity of diction, he touched the sublime by the very simplicity of his utterance.

Her brother Willem, called after the poet's younger brother, did not survive her long. He died, at the age of 23, in 1670. Vondel's daughter Anna was from now on his only companion. The two had moved, after Maria's death, to a house on the *Singel*, nearer the centre of the city. There he finished the translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, his last great work, which saw the light in 1671. After that his working days were over. The doctors warned him against exerting his brain, on account of his great age. He was not so old, however, that he became a prisoner between the walls of his own house, dependent on the calls of friends for his contact with the world outside. He was still able to return the visits

he received, and even to endure the hardships of a journey to Cologne. Within sight of the grave he felt a longing to revisit his cradle, and review his long life from the spot where it took origin. "A few years before his death," says Brandt, "he traveled to his native city and took pleasure in climbing on the bedstead in which he came into the world."

When he approached his ninetieth year, his strength began to fail him. The legs grew limp, and sagged under the weight of the body, he became tied to his chair, and the distance between the fire and the window was the limit of his daily walk. There he sat, intent upon the memories of the past or listening to the fading rumors of the life of the city. He saw the barges glide by with cargoes for the ocean ships in the harbor, he watched on winter days the skaters and golfers on the frozen canal, and listened to the music of the carillons that, at the hours, shed a fountain of sound upon the city. The buzz of commerce did not penetrate to where he lived. The concourse of people round the Weighhouse on the *Dam* had passed beyond his ken and become a pleasant memory. Soon the city itself would have ceased to be real and be a mirage to his illumined vision. One last journey he made through its streets before he was carried to his grave. Feeble of body and of memory, he drove in a sledge to the houses of two burgomasters, to beg them, with his own voice, "that his son's son, his namesake, who, on his mother's side, was a relation of both gentlemen, might be provided with some office or job, so that the boy, who was now working with a shoemaker and earning but little, might have a decent livelihood." But the only comfort that his prayer won



was the kindness of a few well-meaning words. The shoemaker's journeyman was the only son of Joost the Younger and Baertje Hooft. He was a married man at this time and lived with his wife, the old man's servant once and now his granddaughter, under the poet's roof. He gave them board and lodging in return for their attention to his wants. For they were all that fate had left him. Even Anna, his daughter and motherly nurse, had passed away before him. On July 16, 1675, she made her last will, giving the usufruct of all that she possessed to her father, and making Pieter Blesen, a friend of the family, her sole heir. By leaving it to her father, she would have given the creditors of Joost the Younger a hold upon her estate; the old debt was not yet paid off, and she was anxious that he should be left with a competency which was safe from their claims. Within five months of that date Anna was taken from him. She had to leave her father-child to the care of others.

Vondel survived her by more than three years. His age had become a burden. The blood in his veins was growing cold, and he suffered severely in winter. Still he did not long for death. "Don't you long for the life hereafter?" Agnes Block once asked him. "I do," he replied, "but I should like to go to it in Eliah's chariot." The thought of the body's decay was abhorrent to him. "But," he said, "it is no use waiting, Eliah will not come, one has to go the common way." His turn came on February 5, 1679, in the early morning, between four and five. Three days later he was carried to his grave in the New Church on the *Dam* by fourteen poets and lovers of poetry. There was no outcry against the inter-



ment of the Roman Catholic under the stones of the Protestant temple. Dutch tolerance granted him a resting place among the friends that had preceded him, the Sheriff Hooft, Caspar Barlaeus, Daniel Mostaert, Cornelis Plemp, Jacob Baeck. The Muyden circle was gathered as of old and had received its most illustrious member.

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